

THE FAILURE OF THE CHURCHES

BY
A CHURCHMAN

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THE FAILURE OF THE CHURCHES

CHAPTER I

THE FAILURE OF THE CHURCHES

THE condition of Society at the present time is deeply interesting. Democracy prevails over the western world and over the British colonies. Class privileges and exemptions of all kinds have been largely broken down. In a Court of Justice, the labourer properly stands on the same level as a lord. Human energy and industry, aided by invention and discovery, whilst lightening the burdens of the toiler, have multiplied the products of the earth and largely increased the general standard of material comfort. No man now runs the risk of getting racked or reduced to ashes for holding, or refusing to hold, any particular theological opinion; nor of having his ears cropped or his tongue slit for holding, or refusing to hold, any particular view as to the best kind of Government in Church or State.

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The tongue even of the licentious and the anarchic may be almost unrestrainedly wagged; his pen freely driven. Puncheons of good ink are used every day without restraint of any kind. Schoolmasters and schoolmistresses are busy all over the western world at a vast expense to the Nations. The populace can read and write, and are more or less acquainted with elemental arithmetic; and in most countries we hear of great or, at least, considerable material prosperity.

So far, good. Further, the clergy of all denominations are as busy as they can be in many parts—preaching, visiting, baptizing, confirming, and administering all kinds of sacraments and ordinances. Churches and chapels are in most cases well filled, in many crowded, whilst numerous preachers are found exercising their lungs freely at corners of the streets and other public places. Large sums of money, also, are raised for religious purposes. Beautiful churches, built at great cost, are to be found all over the land; missions to the heathen absorb millions annually; hundreds of thousands are spent every year in scattering Bibles broadcast over the world; Church

organisations, various and popular in their objects, are numerous; benevolent projects abound. In these islands alone a clerical army, numbering probably from fifty to sixty thousand souls, is told off specially to instruct their fellow citizens in religious lore and arouse them to religious practice—to watch the manœuvres and defeat the wiles of the Devil—to catch him and tie him up.

I gladly admit the existence of good men amongst the clergy, and of good men and women in all ranks of life: but is the number of them increasing? Are the good becoming better? These are probably amongst the most momentous questions that can be asked. Questions of foreign policies and ironclads; of fiscal schemes and merchant shipping; of railways and electric telegraphs; of steam-navvies and mountain-crushers, and even of kings and kingdoms, are only of secondary importance compared with them; for I apprehend that truly great kings and truly great kingdoms, like all other truly great things, can only arise out of intellectual and moral worth.

Is, then, the number of good men increasing?

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Is the moral character of the Nation improving? Is the higher civilization advancing? To these questions we cannot answer with a decided "No"; neither, unhappily, can we answer with a vigorous "Yes."

In spite of all the baptizing and confirming that takes place; in spite of all the consecrated wines and wafers that are used; in spite of all the confessions that are taken and absolutions which are given; in spite of the well-filled and crowded churches; in spite of all the creeds that are periodically said and sung; in spite of the tens of thousands of sermons which, in these Islands alone, are preached every week, I think we may take it that it is difficult to discover an increasing number of good men; difficult to discover that the character of the Nation is improving—that it is advancing in the higher civilization.

Whilst the Churches are well filled and in some cases crowded, it is at the same time notorious that the best minds are dissatisfied with Church services, and, in many notable cases, refuse to go to Church,—not certainly from any hostility to religion. This fact is notorious to the clergy themselves; so notorious

that we find Church congresses puzzling their brains about it, but finding no solution of the problem.

I am sadly afraid that the Churches in their external prosperity, too much resemble the leafy fig-tree—all very fair in the distance; but when we go and seek fruit thereon, we find none.

Locks and keys continue to be as necessary as ever.

Improvvidence, poverty, rags, and dirt abound amongst us.

The material position of the artisan and labouring classes has been considerably improved; but it does not seem to have been accompanied by any noticeable improvement in their moral character, or in their general efficiency as citizens.

The rule of the trades-unions is not that a man should do the most and the best that he can do for the best wage that he can honestly obtain, but that he should do the least he can do for the highest wage procurable either by fair means or foul. In fact these great organizations are to some extent built on utterly immoral principles.

As far as possible, work has to be contracted for by the piece, and not at a time-rate.

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When by piece-rate, constant examination of the quality of the work done is necessary; when by the time-rate, constant supervision of the quantity done is necessary. Recently a contractor noticed a gang of men languidly engaged in road-making under the municipality of a western city. He was so struck with their languor that he determined to watch the progress of their work, and calculate to what extent they were systematically robbing their employers. He found that they were not working for more than sixpence per day.

In domestic service we hear in all directions of great increase of wages accompanied by declining efficiency of service and character. Generally speaking, the older servants are found to be the best both in character and efficiency. It is certainly to be doubted whether the Apostolic precepts in these matters were ever more extensively ignored than they are at this time—the beginning of the Twentieth Century.

Nor are masters and mistresses innocent in relation to their servants. Hardness, hauteur, foolish insolence, is sometimes seen in their bearing not only towards their servants, but towards their social inferiors in general. It is a great

pity, of course, that such persons should be able to have any servants at all; or enjoy any kind of authority over anybody; or that, by any kind of convention whatever, they should have to be considered the superiors of any other persons.

Think of the corruptions which infect every department of commerce and industry. It may be that these are not more serious than in times past. I hope they are not; but it remains quite certain that commercial corruption is still very great. I doubt if covetousness—sheer greed of material wealth, ever reached a higher pitch of intensity than now. One company promoter, supported by decoy peers, diplomats, and distinguished persons, will legally cheat a confiding body of shareholders out of more money at one stroke, than the whole Empire will lose in a twelvemonth under the predatory assaults of the combined criminal population.

The politician, too, frequently drags out his miserable existence on mere bribery and corruption,—not of cash, but of false, fraudulent and wicked speech.

It is a commonly held theory that the chief function of literature is to amuse, to kill time. Seriousness is dull; high things are not for poor

mortals. On the part even of the author, cash is all too frequently the chief inspiration of his labours.

In a word, we seem to remain sordidly secular. I think we must come to the conclusion that the moral character of the people at large is not improving; that the higher civilization is not advancing; that true well-being and rational happiness are not increasing.

The conclusion is a painful one; but its very painfulness prompts us to search for the cause, and to seek for a remedy—if haply a remedy may be found. No royal commission was ever appointed to inquire into an evil of such magnitude. Can this great evil be, in any measure, combated and alleviated? It is probably the most momentous question that can be raised by man or angel. It demands the sincerest and profoundest attention of earnest men in all walks of life.

Now, side by side with this apparent moral stagnancy in the State of Society, it is to be noted that in nearly all secular enterprise, the history of the later centuries has been a history of advancement. Mathematical, astronomical, mechanical, chemical, and other sciences have


been largely reformed and extended. In medical science, the darkness and barbarity which existed down to a comparatively recent date have, to a great extent, given place to the light and better knowledge of our own day. Superstition has been almost wholly expelled from the secular sciences. Systems of Government, even, have been improved, and the friction between Nations has probably been lessened.

Again, much of the secular service of the world, taking full advantage of all the improvements and advancements in knowledge and invention, is first rate. Railway, steamship, banking, insurance, and other companies have done much to promote our physical and temporal well-being. The public press is a marvel of ability and enterprise. The postal service is, on the whole, most admirable. In fact, most of the great secular services attain, more or less perfectly, the objects for which they were devised—always except in so far as they may be marred by the ignorance and immorality of those engaged in them. It is in the higher life alone that there seems to be no appreciable advancement.

I have long thought upon this subject—the

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apparent utter stagnancy of society in all that pertains to the higher civilization,—the great failure of society as a whole to improve in moral character—the one thing which is supremely worth improving, and without which it can never attain to any enduring and illustrious happiness.

The problem of problems, the enterprise of enterprises, is to increase the general morality. This truly is to civilize. It is moral worth, not money, that forms the great  Wealth of Nations. By mere millions, Mr. Morgan, of New York, can do practically nothing to promote the Millenium. If all the geese in the universe were to lay golden eggs every day as fast as they could be collected, and if these golden eggs were to be equally and daily distributed amongst the individual members of the human race, it would do nothing to increase the general welfare and happiness. This world has no coinage in which to express spiritual values. Virtue alone can guide us in the direction of Heaven. The Golden Age is attainable only through a huge increase in the general morality; but we are face to face with the fact that this most desired increase is not yet visible in any considerable degree.

With whom, if with any, does the blame chiefly lie? With those mainly, I should say, to whom the task of increasing the general morality is mainly committed. To whom is this task supposed to be committed? Mainly, I should say, to the Churches.

My conclusion then is that the Churches are failing in the chief part of the work committed to them—failing apparently to increase the general morality of the Nation, failing to advance the higher civilization, or promote the advent of the Golden Age. As compared with secular effort and enterprise, Church effort, though claiming to be illuminated and inspired by the very Spirit of the Living God is, or seems to be, a more or less complete failure. This brings us to the further conclusion that the Churches or rather the clergy as a whole, are not equal to their work; that their knowledge must be defective and their efforts misapplied; that, in brief, the world requires a great reformation in its theology, and in its Church ministrations—a Reformation proceeding upon perfectly scientific principles, and altogether more thorough-going and whole-hearted than the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century.

It is the object of the following pages to show that this is a right conclusion; but whilst freely criticising and condemning some Church dogmas, I wish it to be clearly understood that all my sympathies are with pure religion. It is only the spiritual possibilities of existence which give us anything adequate to live for. There would be small inducement for us to spend mighty labour in planning and building houses upon the sands—small inducement to battle with heroic valour for an evanescent good. Indeed there would be no inducement for us at all, to engage in stern conflict with the evil powers, if Eternal Death were standing by to swallow us up even in the moment of victory. Our only hope lies in the spiritual and immortal outlook. How can the immortal ever find satisfaction amid the mortal? He who tries to darken our hope in God is worse than a madman. If I thought that the grave was the end of our journey, I would strongly recommend that all kindly efforts should be made to promote the speediest possible extinction of the human race.

CHAPTER II

BRIEF FOR REFORMATION

HOSTILITY to reason, deliberate opposition to common sense is probably the chief cause of the tragical failure of the Churches; and indeed, it seems to me, that there is no hope for them at all except in so far as they consent to be governed in their doctrines and in their policy by the clear dictates of common sense.

Let it not be supposed for a moment that the common sense of anything implies a base sense of it. As far as can be discerned, it is simply the right sense of anything. The man whose whole life is ruled by the common sense, is uncommonly sensible. The common sense comprises the whole series of perceptions,—inner and outer, actual and possible. All true Art and all true poetry and all true religion must be governed by common sense, just as plain carpentry must be governed by common sense—neither less nor more.

“Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. O ye simple, understand

wisdom, and ye fools," (even fools) "be ye of an understanding heart. . . . I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me." This gospel of common sense is announced to all people, inclusive of fools. In religion, wisdom and virtue alone are Catholic.

If Gaius of Derbe and Timotheus, Tychicus and Trophimus approach me in a missionary spirit, it is essential to me that they talk sound sense. They must appeal to my understanding if they want to make any good impression on me. There is no avenue of approach either from God to man or from man to God, but through the avenue of the understanding.

The voice even of the twelve Apostles could not constitute in itself a right criterion of truth. It is of the highest importance that this proposition should be clearly apprehended and religiously laid to heart by all who seek to teach and by all who seek to be taught. In every conceivable case, the wise speaker will address himself to the understanding of his hearer. If the twelve Apostles tell me a story, I am under no obligation, either intellectual or moral, to believe it; much less am I under an obligation to believe any story or doctrine that is only

reported to have been delivered or taught by the Apostolical Brotherhood. Nay, it is quite otherwise. I am actually under a moral and intellectual obligation not to accept a story or a doctrine, even from the lips of the twelve Apostles themselves, unless it be accompanied by evidences or proofs (of which I must be judge) that it is true.

The individual is the ultimate authority for every principle, and the ultimate judge of the evidence for every fact that concerns him. Until an individual has made use of his own judgment in any matter either of principle or fact, he is only possessed of a second-hand and provisional knowledge of it.

The intelligence that disregards the common sense is forthwith reduced to imbecile ravings to the full extent of its transgressions, and ceases indeed to be intelligent. You must drive a nail according to the common sense of the matter and not according to a superconscious assumption of any kind; otherwise there is an extreme likelihood that you will not hit the nail on the head. You must conduct your life according to the dictates of the common sense, and not according to the directions of any kind

of occultism; otherwise, you need not be surprised if you reduce it to tragical wreckage. On the reasonable presumption that he is intelligent, the highest thing that an Arch-Angel can do is to observe and act to the utmost of his power upon the simple common sense of things. It is required that all grown-up persons for whom lunacy cannot be pleaded, shall assent to these propositions.

It is instructive to observe how the conviction of the reliability of the common sense is continually obtruding itself upon thinkers of all the schools of philosophy and theology; although in many cases, unfortunately, they fail to mark the fact clearly enough, or to make due observation of its significance.

"My greatest enemies," said Reginald Scot, in attacking the witch-hunters of the Sixteenth Century, "are young ignorance and old custom, for what folly soever, tract of time hath fostered, it is so superstitiously pursued by some as though no error could be acquainted with custom."

(*Discovery of Witchcraft*, Ep. p. XIV.)

Young ignorance and old custom; the follies fostered by superstition and tract of time: these are the great enemies that, to this day, still stand in the way of Religious Reform.

"He whose assent goes beyond his evidence," wrote John Locke, "owes the excess of his adherence only to prejudice, and does in effect own it when he refuses to hear what is offered against it, declaring thereby that it is not evidence he wants, but the quiet enjoyment of the opinion he is fond of . . . Men are fond of certain tenets upon no other evidence but respect or custom, and think they must maintain them or all is gone; though they have never examined the ground they stand on, nor have ever made them out to themselves, or can make them out to others. We should contend earnestly for the truth, but we should first be sure that it is truth; or else we fight against God, who is the God of Truth, and do the work of the Devil who is the Father and propagator of lies; and our zeal though never so warm, will not excuse us, for this is plainly prejudice. . . . He that by an indifferency, for all but truth, suffers not his assent to go faster than his evidence, nor beyond it, will learn to examine, and examine fairly, instead of presuming; and nobody will be at a loss or in danger from want of embracing those truths which are necessary in his station or circumstances . . . (but) he that con-

siders is a foe to orthodoxy" (There's the deadly mischief!) "because possibly, he may deviate from some of the received opinions . . .

Whether this be the way to truth and right assent, let the opinions that . . . prescribe in the several habitable parts of the earth disclose. I never saw any reason why truth might not be trusted to its own evidence." (Nor did I.) "I am sure if that be not able to support it, there is no fence against error; and then truth and falsehood are but names that stand for the same things. Evidence therefore is that by which alone every man is, and should be, taught to regulate his assent; who is then and then only in the right way when he follows it." (*Conduct of the Understanding*, Works, Vol. III. pp. 401-418—Fo. Ed.) The steady observation of this simple rule would effect wondrous reforms in our theologies and philosophies.

Scarcely less clear is Bishop Butler in his acknowledgment of the necessary Supremacy of Reason in Religion. He recognises and declares in his *Analogy* that "The proper proofs of motives to religion are the proper proofs of it from our moral nature; from the presages of conscience, and our natural apprehension of

God under the character of a righteous Governor and Judge ; a nature and conscience and apprehension given us by Him ; and from the confirmation of the dictates of reason by life and immortality brought to light by the Gospel," etc. (*Analogy. Pt. I. Conclusion.*) This single fact, namely, that the human mind is supposed by all theologians to be the creation of God, should convince every one of them of the reliability of its deliverances, and constrain them to pay reverence to it. They should reflect that in all conceivable circumstances, the dictates of our own minds, if we are to be true to ourselves and others, must be supreme within the circle of their own activities ; that our holiest thoughts are of the mind ; that our apprehension of God Himself is of the mind : therefore that in all conceivable circumstances, the pure dictates of the mind must be our supreme authority in everything. Heaven itself has no conceivable means of addressing itself to us as responsible beings, but to our intelligence.

If theologians from the beginning had possessed the perspicacity to observe, and the integrity to accept the truth of this doctrine, they would have had all the able men on their

side. There would have been no "heretics" worth speaking about. It is the foolish theologians who are mainly responsible for the existence of "heretics." I ask them to bear in mind that in the estimation of contemporary theologians, Christ himself was the great Heresiarch of his day. I ask them to bear in mind that Christ's very name was poison to his orthodox theological contemporaries—priest, Scribe, Pharisee; and that the same class have in every age and country been officially opposed to Daylight. It is thus that, in every age and country, "heretics" have been created. Had theologians only consented to be sensible—say to have been as sensible about their theology as about their boots, they would even have had the Humes and Voltaires on their side.

For example, Hume was of opinion—and what

1 Gallio always seems to me to have been a most admirable magistrate. Seeing that the disputants before him, were mostly babblers, he simply "drave them from the Judgment Seat." This is what we have still to do with large numbers of our theologians and philosophers, who are too frequently found in a state of spumescence against Common Sense and Sound Government. No theologian or philosopher should be listened to, unless he is prepared to say, "I address myself to you as a rational being." To their shame and confusion,—aye, to the confusion of Christendom, the theologians have actually declared their hostility to Reason!

man of sense can doubt that it was a sound opinion?—that the proper office of religion was “to regulate the heart of men, humanise their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order and obedience”; and he continues, “as its operation is silent, and only enforces the motives of morality and justice, it is in danger of being overlooked and confounded with” superstitious motives. “When it distinguishes itself and acts as a separate principle over men” (Here is the common and horrible error.) “it has departed from its proper sphere and has become only a cover to faction and ambition. . . . It is certain from experience that the smallest grain of natural honesty and benevolence has more effect on men’s conduct than the most pompous views suggested by theological theories and systems. . . . But even though superstition or enthusiasm should not put itself in direct opposition to morality” (which, unhappily, it is continually doing), “the very diverting of the attention, the raising up of a new and frivolous species of merit, the preposterous distribution which it makes of praise and blame, must have the most pernicious consequences” (We see such every day), “and weaken

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extremely men's attachment to the natural motives of justice and humanity. Such a principle of action, likewise, not being any of the familiar motives of human conduct, acts only by intervals on the temper, and must be roused by continual efforts, in order to render the pious zealot satisfied with his own conduct, and make him fulfil his devotional task. Many religious exercises are entered into with seeming fervour, when the heart at the time feels cold and languid; a habit of dissimulation is by degrees contracted, and fraud and falsehood become the predominant principle." (For confirmation of the truth of these observations, read ecclesiastical history.) "Hence the reason of that vulgar observation that the highest zeal in religion" (He means superstition) "and the deepest hypocrisy, so far from being inconsistent, are often or commonly united in the same individual character. . . . It is contrary to common sense to entertain apprehensions or terrors upon account of any opinion whatsoever, or to imagine that we run any risk hereafter, by the freest use of our reason. Such a sentiment implies both an absurdity and an inconsistency. It is an absurdity to believe that the Deity has human

passions, and one of the lowest of human passions" (let this be laid to heart!) "a restless appetite for applause. It is an inconsistency to believe that if the Deity has this human passion, he has not others also. . . . Yet is this impiety" (Notice that it is the orthodox theologians who are so horribly impious), "the smallest of which superstition is guilty. Commonly it depresses the Deity far below the condition of mankind; and represents Him as a capricious demon, who exercises his power without reason and without humanity." (*Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Pt. XII, Works Vol. II., pp. 460-466. Green's Edition.) Elsewhere he aptly writes "There is no man so stupid as that, judging by his natural reason, he would not esteem virtue and honesty the most valuable qualities which any person could possess. Why not ascribe the same sentiment to the Deity? Why not make all religion, or the chief part of it to consist in these attainments?" Why not? indeed.

1 *The Natural History of Religion, Essays*, Vol. II., Sect. XIV., p. 358, Green's Edition. In such passages we have Hume in his right mind. Whatever follies and aberrations may be found in some parts of his works, arose no doubt out of the utter disgust with which he viewed the various "orthodoxies" of mankind. As in

Reason must rule. It must rule in religion as well as in counting eggs. "All our reasonings" said that clear thinker Thomas Reid, "in morals, in natural jurisprudence, in the law of nations, as well as our reasonings about the duties of natural religion and about the moral government of the Deity must be founded upon the dictates of our moral faculty as first principles." (*Essays on the Active Powers of Man*, III, 8.) There can be no successful departure from this principle any more than there can be a successful departure from the elementary rules of arithmetic, or from the building of houses upon the ground. All attempted departures from this principle are due either to confused thinking or to fogs of passion, and carry the wanderers into self-contradiction and absurdity.

Dr. Chalmers when off his orthodox guard, was no less emphatic on the sovereignty of reason. He declared that "though it was one of the the case of the Red-Cross Knight his "eye of Reason was with rage yblent," and thrown out of right focus, as he looked out upon the superstition and vileness of the ecclesiastical hag who, through the centuries, had been trying to pose as the spotless Una; and in this frame of mind he unhappily suffered himself, sometimes, to be driven into an equivocal attitude towards religion itself. So with Voltaire and his school.

maxims of the true philosophy never to shrink from a doctrine which had evidence on its side, it was another maxim equally essential to it, never to harbour any doctrine when this evidence was wanting." (*Christian Revelation and Modern Astronomy*, p. 48.) I wish that the good doctor himself had followed this rule on all occasions. I wish that everybody would follow it. How it would clear up the intellectual atmosphere! How it would promote the intellectual and moral health of mankind!

In one of his *Imaginary Conversations*, W. S. Landor exclaims—"Think how much greater is the glory you may acquire by opening new paths to science than by widening old ones to corruption. . . . There are popes in all creeds, in all countries, in all ages." (*Barrow and Newton*.) We must get rid of all the official popes in religion, just as we have got rid of them, or are trying to get rid of them, in medicine, astronomy, engineering. There is no more room for a pope in religion than there is for one in building bridges or digging drains. Popes and councils, in order to be worthy of any respect, must submit themselves quietly to the material and mental laws of Nature. They

must give up any pretence of superiority over the laws of Nature. The mental and material laws of Nature will never submit to popes and councils. On the contrary, Nature speaks to us all in absolute and irrefutable dogmas. The highest thing that man can do—popes and councils included,—is to work themselves into perfect harmony with the laws of Nature—which all theologians, at least, should be able to accept as laws of God.

"Truly," wrote the great and ever picturesque Carlyle, "a thinking man is the worst enemy the Prince of Darkness can have; every time such a one announces himself, I doubt not, there runs a shudder through the Nether Empire; and new emissaries are trained with new tactics, to, if possible, entrap him and hoodwink and handcuff him." (*Sartor Resartus*, II, 4.) Simply, we must grant plenary authority to reason in our warfare with the Prince of Darkness. Our excellent friends the parsons, if they want to make the Devil shudder, must take to thinking—resolute, uncompromising thinking, and loyally accept the results of resolute thought; just as the mathematicians have to accept the results of resolute thought. They may rest assured that

herrings on Fridays, eastward positions or blind dogmas of any kind, send no shudder through the Nether Empire, nor, indeed, any alarm at all ; but are rather calculated to provoke manifestations of contempt and derision in that grim region.

The late Benjamin Jowett thus expressed himself on the religious necessity of thinking honestly on religious subjects :—" The limitation of the human faculties is confusedly appealed to " (by the orthodox), " as a reason for abstaining from investigations which are quite within their limits. The suspicion of Deism, or perhaps of Atheism, awaits inquiry. By such fears a good man refuses to be influenced ; a philosophical mind is apt to cast them aside with too much bitterness. It is better to close the book than to read it under conditions of thought which are imposed from without. Whether those conditions of thought are the traditions of the Church or the opinions of the religious world—Catholic or Protestant, makes no difference. They are inconsistent with the freedom of the truth and the moral character of the Gospel." (*On the Interpretation of Scripture, Essays and Reviews*, p. 343.) The man who contests this proposition was born to keep rabbits.

The historian Froude was equally pronounced on the subject. "The uncertainty," he remarked, "which once affected only the more instructed, extends now to all classes of society. A superficial crust of agreement wearing thinner day by day, is undermined everywhere by a vague misgiving; and there is an unrest which will be satisfied only when the sources of it are probed to the core. The Church authorities repeat a series of phrases which they are pleased to call answers to objections; they treat the most serious grounds of perplexity as if they were puerile and trifling; while it is notorious that for a century past, extremely able men have either not known what to say about them, or *have not said what they thought*." This is the damning fact with many of them—they don't say what they think. Froude continues,—“It may be that the true teaching of our Lord is overlaid with doctrines; and theology when insisting on the reception of its huge catena of formulae may be binding a yoke upon our necks which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear.” (*Short Studies*, Vol. I, pp. 216-219) Let the Church “authorities” reflect. Let them remember that in all ages and countries, the

Devil has been a very great stickler for "orthodoxy"—very devilishly opposed to plain thinking. Let them remember that the greatest frauds and the greatest crimes known to history have been committed in the name of 'authorities' and orthodoxies. They had better ponder upon these things and bethink themselves that it must be a most damnable crime against the Highest to attempt to garrote, or to practise any outrage upon our divinest faculty of reason. Should we be summoned to a private interview with Jupiter Optimus Maximus, we could only meet Him nobly, upon the basis of reason.

Representative men in other walks of life, are no less emphatic in their protests against the folly and sin of irrational pietising which is paralysing the Churches. Huxley, for example, thus expressed himself:—"What we are pleased to call religion now-a-days is, for the most part, Hellenised Judaism; and not unfrequently the Hellenic element carries with it a mighty remnant of old-world paganism, and a great infusion of the worst and weakest products of Greek scientific speculation; while fragments of Persian and Babylonian, or rather Accadian mythology, burden the Judaic contribution to the

common stock. The antagonism of Science is "not to religion." (Note that particularly: Science necessarily harmonises with true religion and true religion with science.)—"The antagonism of science is not to religion, but to the heathen survivals and the bad philosophy under which religion herself is often well nigh crushed. . . .

Peter and Paul, if they could return to life would certainly have to learn the catechism of either the Roman, Greek, or Anglican Churches, if they desired to be considered orthodox Christians."

(*Controverted Questions*, p. 96, and note, p. 204)

The Church catechisms are, mainly, devices to addle human brains. The Anglican, Greek and Roman Churches had better get rid of their catechisms as soon as possible, and betake themselves, in the holy spirit of common sense, to the honest study of sacred things. It is incredible that the Supreme Being can have any respect for those more or less foolish documents.

"The Reformation was arrested," John Ruskin, accurately observed, "and got itself shut up into chancels of Cathedrals in England . . . and into conventicles everywhere else. Then rising between the infancy of Reformation and the palsy of Catholicism; between a new shell

of half-built religion on one side, daubed with untempered mortar, and a falling ruin of outworn religion on the other, lizard-crannied and ivy-grown, rose on its independent foundation, the faithless and materialised mind of modern Europe—ending in the . . . polite formalism of England, the careless plasmphemy of France, and the helpless sensualities of Italy; in the midst of which, steadily advancing science and the charities of more and more widely extended peace are preparing the way for a Christian Church, which shall depend neither on ignorance for its continuance, nor on controversy for its progress, but shall reign at once in light and love." (*Modern Painters*, Vol. V, p. 276.) It is now high time for the Churches to proceed in the paths of Reformation, and to war mightily against fraud and folly, in whatever garb of pietism they may have clothed themselves.

"We are bound in consistency," Herbert Spencer rightly says, "to receive the widest knowledge which our faculties can reach, or to reject along with it that narrow knowledge possessed by all. There is no logical alternative between accepting our intelligence in its entirety, or repudiating even that lowest intelli-

gence, which we possess in common with brutes." (*First Principles* (1863) p. 19.) The clergyman who does not agree with Herbert Spencer on this point, is still in the lowest state of mental confusion. Such a one may be fit to be a pastor of geese, but he is not fit to be a pastor of men.

Mr. John Morley is equally opposed to our orthodoxies and speaks of them in irrefutable condemnation. "The old hopes have grown pale," he writes, "the old fears dim; strong sanctions are become weak, and once vivid faiths very numb." Religion, whatever destinies may be in store for it, is at least for the present, hardly any longer an organic power. It is not that supreme, penetrating, controlling, decisive part of a man's life which it has been and will be again . . . These who dwell in the tower of ancient faith look about them in constant apprehension, misgiving and wonder, with the hurried, uneasy mien of people living amongst earthquakes. The air seems to their alarms to be full of missiles, and all is doubt, hesitation and shivering expectancy. . . . Whilst thought stirs and knowledge extends, the Church remains fast moored by ancient formularies. While the Spirit of man expands in search after new light,

and feels energetically for new truth, the Spirit of the church is eternally entombed within the four corners of Acts of Parliament. Her ministers vow before they have crossed the threshold of manhood that they will search no more." (This fearful sin should be no longer tolerated. It is sending rottenness into the bones of the Nation.) "They virtually swear," he continues, "that they will to the end of their days, believe what they believe then, before they have had time either to think, or to know the thoughts of others. They take oath, in other words, to lead mutilated lives. The same system which begins by making mental indolence a virtue and intellectual narrowness a part of sanctity, ends by putting a premium on something too like hypocrisy. Consider the seriousness of fastening up in these bonds some thousands of the most instructed and intelligent classes in the country, the very men who would otherwise be best fitted from position and opportunity for aiding a little in the long, difficult and plainly inevitable work of transforming opinion. Consider the waste of intelligence, and what is assuredly not less grave, the positive dead weight and thick obstruction,

by which an official hierarchy so organised must paralyse mental independence in the Community." (*On Compromise*, pp. 36-38.) Yes, consider these things: They are more terrible than thieves' kitchens.

The poets also are agreed that reason must rule. Thus Edmund Spenser:—

"What war so cruel, or what siege so sore
As that, which strong affections do apply
Against the fort of Reason evermore
To bring the soul into captivity!
Their force is fiercer through infirmity
Of the frail flesh, relenting to their rage;
And exercise most bitter tyranny
Upon the parts brought into their bondage,
No wretchedness is-like to sinful villeinage.

"But in a body which doth freely yield
His parts to Reason's rule obedient,
And letteth her that ought the sceptre wield,
All happy peace and goodly government
Is settled there in sure establishment.
There Alma, like a virgin queen most bright,
Doth flourish in all beauty excellent;
And to her guests doth bounteous banquet dight,
Attempered goodly well for health and for
delight."

Every kind of hocus-pocus requisition, irrational creeds and condemnations every one, must

be regarded "but as bugs to fearen babes withal," and manfully abolished.

Milton is no less determined as to the primacy of reason. "Know," he says,

"that in the soul
Are many lesser faculties that serve
Reason as chief; "

that, indeed,

"reason is her being,
Discursive or Intuitive."¹

Again, he says:—

"Most reason is that reason overcome";²

And yet, since the world began, nearly all the theologians have been fatuous enough to war upon Reason!

Consult Robert Browning, too, in the matter:—

"Ask thy lone soul what laws are plain to thee,—
Thee and no other,—stand or fall by them!
That is the part for thee: regard all else
For what it may be,—Time's illusion."³

Just so. We must stand by the laws that are clear to us, exactly as we stand by the laws of

¹ *Paradise Lost*, Book V.

² *Ib.*, Book VI.

³ *Ferishtah's Fancies—A Camel-Driver.*

44 THE FAILURE OF THE CHURCHES

pounds, shillings, and pence. No less to the point, Tennyson declared:—

“I can but lift the torch
Of Reason in the dusky cave of life,
And gaze on this great miracle the world,
Adoring that who made, and makes, and is,
And is not what I gaze on—all else, Form,
Ritual, varying with the tribes of men.”

I do not believe that any man alive can let his mind freely and fully operate on this subject, without coming to the same conclusion; and if I am forbidden to have a free mind, if I am under Divine ban and curse when I exercise this sacred freedom, I would much rather be a crow than the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Some of our later theologians are no less outspoken than the men I have mentioned, on the necessity of free and sound thinking. Take the late Mark Pattison. He declared himself thus:—“A stiff and blighting dogmatic spirit is destroying our intellectual life, while the Church is displaying an unparalleled energy in building, endowing, subscribing, and every form of material outlay. As its moral vigour dries up, its material wealth expands. When we look at the power of the Anglican School to grapple

with moral difficulties, to adjust the social machine, what impotence, combined with what pretensions do we find there!" (*Essays*, Vol. II., pp. 281-294)—mainly, of course, through its most irreligious and damnable insurrection against that sacred common sense with which we have been endowed by Almighty God. If the XXIV. Orders of Knaves were to enter into a combination against the human race, they could not effect a thousandth part of the mischief which the theologians have accomplished against it, in their age-long labours to invalidate and betray the common sense. I repeat that the devil is at his deadliest when he tries to undermine and destroy our common sense. It is an attempt to extinguish our spiritual eyesight: May all his assistants be seized with repentance and red-hot shame, when they enter upon their accursed task.

The late Rev. H. R. Haweis strongly declared himself in favour of rational Church Reform. "Do not suppose," said he, "that great as were these changes," (those of the Reformation), "they were in any sense final. The Reformation was the first, not the last, note of the National Church; it indicated the direction in

which, henceforth, she intended to travel. We have come to a time now in this Nineteenth Century, when the Reformation itself requires to be reformed. The Age has swept by the Church"—i.e., all the Churches. "Its methods are antiquated; its doctrines require re-statement; its services are totally unfit to win the masses, or to express with any adequate force or range, the convictions of educated people; its clergy are hampered in their teaching and saddled with obsolete formularies, so that few young men of ability care to take Holy Orders. But when I look back to the English Reformation, I cannot despair. If so great a reform as a breach with Rome could be accomplished, there is hardly any reform conceivable which the Church of England may not accomplish to bring herself into harmony with the thought, progress and intelligence of the age and the hearts of the people. God knows such a reform was never more wanted than it is now." (*Key of Doctrine and Practice*, p. 153.)

With true liberality of thought and with right indignation, Dean Farrar has declared himself against the irrational and the passion-bred in theology: "I protest at once and finally against

the ignorant tyranny of isolated texts, which has ever been the curse of Christian truth, the glory of narrow intellects, and the cause of the worst errors of the worst days of the corrupted Church." (*Eternal Hope*, p. 75.)

Then there is a new Canterbury tale not as cheerful ~~as~~ some of Chaucer's. "A revelation speaking from without and not from within is an external law," said the late Dr. Temple," and not a spirit. . . . At this time. . . . the great lever which moves the world is knowledge; the great force is the intellect. St. Paul has told us that though in malice we must be children, in understanding we ought to be men. And this saying of his, has the widest range. Not only in the understanding of religious truth, but in all exercise of the intellectual powers, we have no right to stop short of any limit but that which

1 The external or "Church" authorities have all too frequently been the chief of sinners: e.g., "For the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her, they have wandered as blind men in the streets; they have polluted themselves with blood, so that men could not touch their garments" (*Lam.* 4, 13-14). The same in the time of Christ,—the external, or Church, or "orthodox" authorities—priests, scribes, Pharisees, His enemies and murderers. These facts alone should be sufficient to destroy every sacerdotal claim to superior illumination.

nature, that is, the decree of the Creator, has imposed on us. In fact no knowledge can be without effect on religious convictions. . . . If we have made mistakes, careful study may teach us better. If we have quarrelled about words, the enlightenment of the understanding is the best means to show us our folly." (The best service that can be rendered to man). "If we have vainly puzzled our intellects with subjects beyond human cognizance, better knowledge of ourselves will help us to be humbler. Life, indeed, is higher than all else ; and no service that man can render to his fellows is to be compared with the heavenly power of a life of holiness. But next to that must be ranked whatever tends to make men think clearly and judge correctly. So valuable even above all things (excepting only godliness) is clear thought"—(There is a little confusion here. It should be observed that godliness itself derives its highest sanctions from thought. In fact it is only through thought that we can be godly. Godliness without thought, is merely a misnomer for superstition. Thought is the necessary basis of responsible life). So valuable even above all things is clear thought, "that the labours of the statesman are far below

those of the philosopher in duration, in power, and in beneficial results." (The only chance for the human race lies in its getting inspired by noble thought). "Thought is now higher than action, unless action be inspired with the very breath of Heaven"—which is simply another name for lofty thought. "For we are now men governed by principles, if governed at all, and cannot rely any longer on the impulses of youth, or the discipline of childhood." (*The Education of the World. Essays and Reviews*, pp. 36-49.)

The sad and bad part of this Canterbury tale is that Dr. Temple appears to have apostatized from these grand principles and to have metamorphosed his glorious flag into a pocket-handkerchief. He actually seems to have consented to burke this fine and aspiring paper of his on "The Education of the World"—unrefuted and irrefutable though it was; and to have toned down his bold war-cry for Church Reformation, into an inaudible whisper. "These things," he has practically said, "are indubitably true, but for God's sake (or some other person's) don't dwell on them!" In other words, he seems to have ceased to govern himself after the great principles of free intelligence; and to have de-

scended to the ignoble task of so suppressing his reforming thoughts that he might sit in any meeting of ecclesiastical and pietistical old women without alarming them. Needless to say, the "Education of the World" cannot be proceeded with under such methods. Lucifer sitting in Council in his Cathedral City of Pandemonium, could scarcely devise a better method of perpetuating his Kingdom of Darkness.

Here I will only add another testimony to the necessity for sound thinking in theology as well as in all other provinces of learning. Dr. John Caird, representing the Scottish Church, makes the following profound and far-reaching observation on the subject. "We must have rational grounds for the acceptance of a supernatural revelation. . . Reason must be competent to judge, if not of the content, at least of the credentials of Revelation. But an authority proving by reason its right to teach irrationally, is an impossible conception. The authority which appeals to reason in proof of its rights, commits itself, so to speak, to be essentially rational. To prove to reason a right to set reason at defiance is self-contradictory, inasmuch as the proof itself must be one of the things to which that right extends. To try to convince

me that I ought to distrust my natural reason, and believe things that revolt it, involves the same practical paralogism as the attempt to prove to an insane man that he is insane.

Reason itself lies nearer to us than any external authority"—much nearer to us, for example, than Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John, "and no other or outward evidence can be sufficient to overturn its testimony." All the theologians should mark and realise this great truth. "Even a miracle," he continues, "which is possible only as a breach of an order that is not absolute, could never be accepted as proof of a breach of an order which is absolute. There can be no such thing as a moral or metaphysical miracle"—(that is to say, there can be no miracle within the region of Necessary Truth); "and certainly a physical wonder could not prove its existence. The attempt therefore to maintain an unreal equilibrium between faith and reason—between a reverence which accepts and an intelligence which rejects, the same things, can only issue in one of two results, practical unbelief, or the violent suppression of doubt. No adjustment of the difference can be satisfactory save an adjustment *in thought*. Either the doctrines of positive religion must be shown to be in har-

mony with reason, or at least, reason must be silent as to their truth or falsehood. Thought must with intelligent insight pronounce for them; or it must be shown why, from their very nature, thought can pronounce neither for nor against them." (*An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 64-65.) All this will be found to be absolutely true—absolutely in accord with the requisitions of our intellectual nature. Every clergyman of normal endowment is under an obligation to recognise it—an obligation as sacred and imperative as that which requires him to recognise and discharge his money debts.

The foregoing passages, which could be indefinitely multiplied, are culled from the writings of serious and able men of different ages and of different schools, and representing the chief departments of human thoughts—poetry, history, physical science, mental science, theology. They are united, it will be observed, in one demand, that the sacred as well as the secular be made subject to the laws of our intellectual and moral nature. Reason must rule. In this contention, Butler goes with Locke, Reid with Hume, Chalmers with Carlyle, Jowett with Huxley, Temple with Herbert Spencer, Milton with

Tennyson, and all the others are in complete agreement with them. Reason must rule. There can be no decent departure from it. Reason is the clearest voice that reaches us either from Earth or Heaven. All these men, of temperament so varied, of pursuits so distinct from each other, are unanimous in their recognition of this great principle. I ask the serious consideration of earnest men in all walks of life, to this grand fact. Explicitly or implicitly, they are united in condemning our Church dogmas together with our "orthodox" methods of dealing with religious questions; and the passages quoted from their writings in this chapter, furnish us with a well-written brief, if such were required, for a drastic Reformation in theology.

The potential strength of the Churches is tremendous; but it must lie dormant, or be fruitlessly or even harmfully expended until it be placed under the beneficial control and direction of intelligence. Until this Reformation be accomplished, and the Church at large has learned to make her whole appeal to the intelligence and to the higher nature of man, she remains but a blind giant in our midst—wearily grinding husks which can yield no meal.

CHAPTER III.

THE DOGMA THAT THE SCRIPTURES ARE THE WORD OF GOD

GLANCE at one or two of the leading dogmas of orthodoxy. The first dogma that thrusts itself upon our notice and demands our consideration, is that which pronounces the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the "Word of God." If this dogma that the scriptures are the very word of the Living God be true, it must be one of stupendous importance; if false, it must be prolific in disaster as long as it endures. If the dogma be true, the least we can expect from the canonical writings is this—that with regard to matter of fact, they shall be found to be historically true, or, at least, historically credible from beginning to end; and that with regard to doctrine and matter of principle, they shall be found to be clear and consistent with themselves and with intellectual and moral truth. Let us see how they stand this test.

I.—ABSURD STORIES.

Take the story of the flood. Is the story true?

or credible? Of course it is of a highly miraculous nature, but I do not necessarily raise any objection on that account. I do not agree with those who assert that a miracle is *a priori* impossible. To the Supreme Power I should suppose that nothing that is not opposed to necessary truth is impossible; so that however miraculous a story may be, it ought not to be prejudged as false on that account; but, if it seems to deserve attention, should be examined and weighed in the light of any evidence that may be adduced in favour of it. As becometh reasonable beings, however, it should require stronger evidence to induce our acceptance of a miraculous story than of one which accords with the ordinary constitution of things. Is, then, this flood story true?

Practically, there is no evidence to support it—no contemporaneous document or inscription of any kind, no terrestrial sign that any such universal cataclysm ever took place. Our only evidence for it is to be found in an anonymous document written some indefinite thousands of years, probably, after the reputed event. In a word, there does not exist one particle of ordinary historic evidence in favour of the story.

But a story may be true although it be unsupported by any scrap of evidence. In such a case we ask if the story be credible. Is it, then, credible? Consider it.

(1) Notice that the All-wise God "repents" that He has made man and beast. Obviously the statement impeaches the divine wisdom. "God is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent."

(2) To remedy His huge blunder—humanity having become so wicked, He proposes to drown the whole human race with the exception of one family. Without interposing any question about the millions of necessarily innocent children who would then be in existence, this resolution to drown everybody is plainly, I think, a counsel of vacillation and weakness, if not of wickedness, invented by the merest of men and not by a paternal God.

(3) He has also determined to drown all the dumb animals—surely a most wanton and altogether inexcusable proceeding. What had the poor beasts done that all this fury should be poured upon them!

(4) But Noah was a good man and found grace with God, who accordingly determined to except

him and his family from the sweeping sentence which He had pronounced against man and beast. Pursuant to this resolution, He has an interview with Noah, wherein He informs him of His tragical purpose (*Genesis* 6, 13), and advises him how he may escape from the general doom. He is to build a three-decker Ark of certain specified dimensions, which he is to tar all over, within and without, with tar. This ark is to be fitted with a door and a window; and Noah and his family are to retire into it in due course. Further, although God had repented the creating of beasts as well as of man, and made up His mind to visit them with universal destruction, we now find that He has thought better of it, and that he orders Noah to bring "two of every sort" of these doomed animals into the ark with him to "keep them alive." (*Genesis* 6, 19.) Due provision is also to be made for food both for man and beast; which instructions Noah faithfully follows "according to all that God commanded him."

Touching this narrative, innumerable questions immediately arise. How did Noah succeed in whistling the animals together from all the ends

of the earth? How did he succeed in getting such a variety of animals properly separated and penned up within the comparatively narrow compass of the ark? How did he succeed in keeping down fierce disturbances amongst the lions and tigers, the bears and wolves, and so forth, which had necessarily to be penned so closely together? How did he find proper food for all the animals comprised in his universal menagerie? How did he keep up the commissariat supplies? How did he master such difficulties as those of ventilation and sanitation in a vessel which was only furnished with one door and one window?

(5) At the appointed time, "the fountains of the great deep were broken up and the windows of Heaven were opened; and the waters increased greatly and prevailed upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters. And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered. Fifteen cubits upwards did the waters prevail, and the mountains were covered. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth. . . . And Noah only remained alive and they that were with him in the ark." (*Genesis 7, 11-23.*)

Further questions arise. "All the higher hills . . . were covered." In other words the waters of the flood were several miles deep over the whole earth, and consequently seeing the trick that water has of finding its own level, over the whole ocean. That is to say that the waters of the flood were a great many times more copious than the waters of the whole ocean in its normal state!

Thus whilst there is no external evidence in favour of the story, it is internally and in itself absolutely incredible. It is theologically and morally incredible, inasmuch as it gives us a degrading view not only of the knowledge and power, but of the moral character of God; it is physically incredible, inasmuch as the cargo of the ark could not have been collected, fed and generally maintained without an accumulated and prolonged series of miraculous interventions; and, thirdly, it is cosmically incredible, as it does not appear that there was a sufficient supply of salt and fresh liquid on our planet to furnish water for such a flood.

Consequently the story cannot be of the "Word of God." In fact it is an insult to God and an insult to all higher human intelligences

to assert it to be the "Word of God." It is impiety, and not piety, to say that it is the "Word of God." I ask the assent of all clergymen and of all sensible persons to this conclusion.

It is not possible to speak more respectfully of the historic authenticity of many other Bible stories. Take the story of Isaac and the venison. When the patriarch was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, "he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My Son, and he said unto him, Behold here am I. And he said, Behold now I am old, I know not the day of my death." (*Genesis 27.*) This might well have been the preface to some noble counsel, or message, or request, but what follows? "Now, therefore, take I pray, thee thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field and take me some venison; and make me savoury meat such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless thee before I die." Apart from the essential absurdity of the story, note its incongruity; note its killing descent from the sublime to the ridiculous; note the utter degradation which it brings upon Isaac. And the whole of the sequel of

the story—the traffic in, and the filching of, the paternal blessing, is in exact keeping with the initial absurdity. Indeed the sequel of the story is still more absurd than the beginning, if that be possible; for granting that Isaac, by reason of his physical infirmities together with the infamous deceit practised upon him by Jacob, did really pronounce upon the head of Jacob the blessing intended for Isaac, that blessing, for everything that it was worth, would necessarily have descended upon Esau for whom it was intended; for although Jacob might possibly have deceived his father by the clumsy trickery related in the story, it is quite clear that he could not have deceived the omniscient God, through whom alone the blessing could be expected to come. Yet the writer of the narrative does not notice these obvious points, and actually assumes that Jacob succeeded in carrying away the blessing—thus circumventing Omniscience and making Him a party to the abominable fraud which he had committed against his father and his brother. (*Genesis 27, 33-36.*)

Consequently to call such a story as this the “Word of God” is not merely an insult to human intelligence, but a contemptible insult to God

Himself. It would be easy to adduce further stories from the scriptures of an equally incredible nature. *E.g.* The interview between Almighty God and Abraham on the subject of circumcision; or the further interview in the plains of Mamre—grandly imagined though it be. (*Genesis* cc., 17. and 18.) Notice also that both these stories are contradictory to the New Testament statement that "No man hath seen God at any time."

II.—BARBAROUS DOCTRINES.

Notice now the barbarous doctrines and the grotesque incongruity of thought which are to be found freely scattered throughout the scriptures. Take the command: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live." (*Exodus* 22, 18.) Is that the "Word of God?" I hope not. A witch is a creature supposed to be in conscious communion with the powers of darkness. Needless to say almost, there is no authentic testimony to prove that any such being ever lived—none; but the dark ages having imagined the existence of such beings, and witch-prosecution having been regarded as a duty, the command under consideration—"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live"

has inspired and furnished an excuse for a long series of the most hideous crimes of which the human race have been guilty; and I submit that it is nothing less than horrible blasphemy to teach that such a doctrine is to be reckoned as "Word of God."

Notice the grotesque incongruity of thought and the sanguinary spirit which characterise such passages as the following: "The Lord spake unto Moses saying, "Thou shalt also make a laver of brass and his foot also of brass to wash withal; and thou shalt put it between the tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put the water therein; for Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and feet thereat. When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water *that they die not,*" *et seq.* (*Exodus 30, 17-20.*) Is it conceivable that Almighty God revealed Himself from Heaven to give Moses verbal instructions regarding those ecclesiastical water-buckets! Notice also that the command touching the lavers carries with it sentence of death in the event of non-compliance. So with regard to the use of ecclesiastical spices: "And the Lord said unto Moses, take unto thee sweet spices, stacte

and onycha and galbanum, these sweet spices with pure frankincense; and thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection, after the art of the apothecary, tempered together pure and holy. . .

Whosoever shall make like unto that to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people." (Exodus 30, 34-38.) Did the maker of heaven and earth descend to earth to give instructions touching the ecclesiastical perfumery? Did He make those truculent threats against lay artists who should dare to copy the ecclesiastical recipe! Or carefully read the passage touching the ceremonial to be observed in "the sin-offering of ignorance;" (Lev. iv.) or about "the law of the sin-offering" (Ib. 6, 24-30); or about "the day of atonement" (Ib. 23, 27-30); and having carefully considered such passages, ask yourself seriously: Is it conceivable that the Divine Majesty ever "spake unto Moses" any such soul-vexing twaddle?

Is it conceivable that Almighty God ever said unto Moses, "Speak unto Aaron and say to him, when thou lightest the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light over against the candlestick?" (Num. 8, 1-2.) Do you believe that God ever gave Moses the elaborate instructions set forth

regarding the blowing of the ecclesiastical trumpets? (*Ib.* 10, 1-10,)—feeble enough to have been devised by the brain of the feeblest curate. Do you believe that Moses argued and remonstrated with, and triumphed over, God in the manner set forth in the Book of Numbers? (*Ib.* 14, 15-20.) Or what about the following story—"While the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks on the Sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. And they put him in ward because it was not declared what should be done unto him. And the Lord said unto Moses, the man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones, without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses." (*Num.* 15, 32-37.) Do you believe that God intervened among the Israelites in this manner? Would you like to believe it! I take it to be mere "broth of abominable things"—like that spoken of by the Prophet.

"The Lord spake unto Moses, Vex the

Midianites and smite them," (*Ib.* 25, 16-18). *et seq.* "The Lord spake unto Moses saying,

Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites."

(*Ib.* 31, 1-2). Moses proceeds to carry out his

instructions; the Israelites war upon the

Midianites and destroy them down to the

ground, and they "took all the women of Midian

captives and their little ones, and took the spoil

of all their cattle and all their flocks and all their

goods. And Moses said unto them,

have ye saved all the women alive? Behold

the cause which hath caused the children of Israel through the

counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass

against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there

was a plague among the congregation of the

Lord. Now therefore, kill every male among

the little ones, and kill every woman," (*Ib.* 31,

8-18), *et seq.* Do you believe that God actually

commanded Moses to perpetrate this bloody

butchery of women and children? Do any of

the Bench of Bishops believe it? We shall

honour their intelligence by assuming that they

do not believe it. In my own opinion, no worse

doctrine has been preached since the Devil

lighted on the top of Mount Niphates.

Go a little further. "When the Lord thy God

shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; and when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee, thou shalt smite them and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them," (*Deut. 7, 1-3*), *et seq.* "And thou shalt consume all the people which the Lord thy God shall deliver thee; thine eye shall have no pity upon them" (*Ib. 7, 16*); and notice the devilish malignancy of the following passage: "If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend which is as thine own soul, entreat thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other Gods which thou hast not known, these, nor thy father's, namely, of the Gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; thou shalt not consent unto him nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou

conceal him ; but thou shalt surely kill him ; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones that he die, because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God." (*Ib.* 13, 6-10.) All these and innumerable other passages are quite in the bloodiest vein of the Spanish inquisitors. The Almighty is represented as a mere monster of cruelty ever foaming forth a froth of jealous fury against everybody and everything that can in any wise be supposed to be hostile to Himself or His "chosen people." *These last passages actually furnished the Jews with a legal warranty for the condemnation of Christ, and yet our churches call it "Word of God"!*

Can we be expected to believe such stories about the Lord of the Universe?—the same God who is supposed to be the Author of Christianity—the All-good God whom we suppose to be the same yesterday, to-day and for ever—the Father of mercy and peace? Are they credible at all? Did he inspire passages under which Christ could be legally murdered! No. We dishonour God ; we blaspheme His sacred Name, when we give any particle of credence whatever to such stories.

The man Moses may have been guilty of promulgating the sanguinary commands and authorising the slaughters and infamous murders of which we have been reading,—although I would fain hope better things of so great a man as Moses; but I think we may safely and gladly conclude that God never gave any countenance to such proceedings. At all events, we will not believe it but upon the most unimpeachable evidence; and if such evidence could unhappily be produced, there would be nothing left for us to do but to moan our souls away in utter despair.

Now, turn to the Psalmist:—"Hold not thy peace, O God of my praise, for the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me . . . and they have rewarded me evil for good and hatred for my love. Set thou a wicked man over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds and beg; let him seek their bread also out of their desolate places. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath, and let the stranger

spoil his labours. Let there be none to extend mercy to him, neither let there be any favour to his fatherless children. Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following, let their name be blotted out"; (*Psalm 109*), and so on. It is undoubtedly a most sulphuric composition in curses, but whether would you take it to be inspired by God or by the Devil? The Devil, I should say, without hesitation.

"This is the Lord," says Isaiah, "we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For in this mountain shall the hand of the Lord rest, and Moab shall be trodden down under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill." (*Isaiah, 25, 9-10.*) On what ground would our creed-manufacturers take that passage to be divinely inspired? Verily, Mr. Buff Orpington has remarkable brains. It is amazing to think that forty or fifty generations of various families of mankind should have put up with the superstitions and stupidities of "orthodox" Christianity. It is a clear indication that the long duration of an opinion is no warranty of its validity. The inertia of humanity is wonderful.

"Thus saith the Lord God," the Gentiles,

"shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders; and Kings shall be thy nursing fathers and their Queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their face towards the earth and lick up the dust of thy feet." (*Isaiah* 49, 22-23.) For my part, I cannot believe that God ever said anything of the kind. Do you apprehend any flavour of divinity in the passage? Do you feel disposed to lick the dust off the feet of any Jew or Jews whom you may be acquainted with? I don't.

"Thus saith the Lord . . . I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children; and I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh, and they shall be drunken with their own blood as with sweet wine." (*Jer.* 49, 25-26.) "They that rule over them make them to howl, saith the Lord" (*Jer.* 52, 5.) Is it credible that God ever said such things?

"So didst thou lead thy people to make thyself a glorious name . . . We are thine: thou never barest rule over them; they were not called by thy name." (*Jer.* 63, 14-19.) Notice the contracted notions pervading such passages. God

has taken particular care of the Hebrews in order to make for Himself a glorious name! And he has no concern touching the poor Heathen at all!

Just glance at a passage or two from Jeremiah. For example—"Behold I will send serpents and cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the Lord." (*Jer.* 8, 17.) It is scarcely credible, surely, that this was a verbatim message from God.

"Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not," etc. (*Jer.* 10, 25.)—so far did Jeremiah forget himself.

"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Every bottle shall be filled with wine, and they shall say unto thee, Do we not certainly know that every bottle shall be filled with wine? Then shalt thou say unto them, Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will fill all the inhabitants of this land, even the Kings that sit upon David's throne and the priests, and the prophets and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with drunkenness; and I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together, saith the Lord; I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy but destroy

them." (*Jer.* 13, 12-14.) Is the Divine Majesty to be debited with such speeches? I think we must find a very much lower author for them.

Thus in many parts of the Old Testament there is manifested the most barbarous theology and the fiercest spirit of intolerance. Unfortunately the New Testament is not wholly free from the same bad spirit.

"I beseech you, brethren," says the Apostle Paul "mark them which cause divisions and offences *contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned*" (merely the doctrine, mark, which they have "learned") "*and avoid them.*" (*Rom.* 16, 17.) Obviously it breathes the very spirit of priestcraft. No man and no body of men in the whole world have a right, or ever had a right, to make such a demand upon their fellow men. In all controversies, I submit, the proper and the religious thing to do, is not to prejudge the case in favour of the favourite party, but, obviously, to judge without prejudice of the matter in dispute—to judge righteous judgment, and to act in accordance with this judgment. To act otherwise were to turn traitor to oneself; and I see not how the man who has turned traitor to himself can be other than a traitor to God, seeing that it

was God who provided us with all our faculties. In so far as a man accepts a merely prescribed belief he is intellectually and spiritually a slave; and until he frees himself from this bondage and insists upon clearly thinking for himself, he cannot be a freeman of the Kingdom of God. Every doctrine, sacred or secular, must patiently submit to, and be governed by, the laws of evidence.

In another place Paul writes:—"Though we or an angel from Heaven, preach any other gospel, let him be accursed (anathema). As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (anathema). (*Gal. 1, 8-9*) In another place,— "We command you, brethren, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walked disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye received from us." (*II. Thess. 3, 6*.) This is that very sin—swearing blindly by the "traditions of the elders," for which Christ so bitterly condemned the Scribes and Pharisees. Further down he repeats the offence:—"If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man and have no company with him," etc.—

(*1b. 3, 14.*)—although happily he adds, "Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." But in yet another epistle he writes:—"A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject," etc. (*Titus, 3, 10.*) Now, surely, all this kind of advice was doubly reprehensible in Paul, in view of his own earlier history. Was he not the very last man in the world who should have presumed to "command" anybody with regard to his religious convictions?

The same kind of presumption manifests itself elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, in the second epistle attributed to John it is written:—"If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house." (*II. John, 10-11.*) What would be said in our own day, if any of our own bishops were to give such advice, say, in a pastoral letter! He would as soon think of breaking his pastoral staff over a heretick's head. How gladly, therefore, would we learn, if it were possible, that all such passages were quite spurious—not the work of those men whose names they bear. In any case, they seem to be the evil spawn of superstition and not the "Word of God" at all.

We are appalled to find that Christ himself is

represented as saying some most questionable things,—*e.g.*, that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God. The gist of the saying obviously is—however much it may be glossed over,—that it is practically impossible for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God. Now it is positively incumbent upon us to hope that Christ never said such a thing—a saying which straightway impeaches both the wisdom of Christ and the goodness of God. Where would our benevolent institutions be, if we had no rich men amongst us? Where, our Museums, Libraries and Art Galleries? Some of our rich men, it appears to me, seem to be worthy of enrolment amongst the best of our species. If it were really true that a rich man could scarcely hope to enter the Kingdom of God, we should be driven to the ghastly conclusion that even our bishops—the whole bench of our bishops of the Church of England, were practically beyond the pale of salvation. In mere self-defence, therefore, the whole bench of bishops must disbelieve the doctrine that a rich man cannot enter into the Heavenly Kingdom.

Here is a kind of Touchstone of Truth. A

truth once apprehended becomes part of a man and cannot be discharged from his intelligence. Falsehood or error, on the other hand can never be intellectually assimilated, and gets easily destroyed under the dissolvent powers of intelligence: *e.g.*, this doctrine that a rich man cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. Indeed it will not bear thinking about—opposed as it plainly is to sense and humanity.

How gloriously superior are all the sacred writers when they are simply engaged in extolling the beauty, and in exhorting their converts to the heroic practice, of Godly life. Then it is that they strike the loftiest notes. Everywhere let us have noble life, noble character,—in which there can be no condemnation. We are masters of nothing in the whole Universe but our characters—responsible for nothing but our characters. I think we may confidently predict that character is the Religion of New Jerusalem; and if anybody is desirous of becoming an inhabitant of that great City, one cannot but think that the highest advice which the clergy could give him would be that he should begin now to make a close examination of his character; and, in preference to all other exercitations,

to reform it wherever found bad or defective, in a spirit of stern resolution and integrity. If you wish to become a citizen of New Jerusalem, I apprehend that you must be a good character. In this simple contention, I am sure that all the bishops will agree with me. If the world were were not blinded and stupefied by its foolish irrationalities and conventionalities, it would see these things at a glance.

Then what are we to make of the fire-and-brimstone passages—about lakes burning with fire and brimstone, and so forth? Are these passages designed by men's imaginations or God's thoughts? I hope that they are merely men's imaginations and that there is no inspiration of God in them at all—no more than there is in the conception of an "excrementitious Hell." But whilst saying this, I fully recognise the vile-ness of sin; and cannot but see that the unrepentant sinner is in a fearful plight and in an exceedingly bad way of life.

III.—DEMONOLOGY.

Let us now turn to another objection. What are we to say of the innumerable passages in the Gospels in which Christ is represented as having,

without question, adopted the vulgar and ridiculous demonology of his age? A sorrowing father comes to him with an afflicted son. "He is lunatick and sore vexed," says the father, "and oftentimes he falleth into the fire and oft into the water." It is evidently the description of an epileptic; and yet Christ is represented as having treated the poor boy as being possessed of a devil." Jesus rebuked the devil, and he departed out of him, and the child was cured from that hour." (*Matt. 17, 18.*) Needless to say, all these thoughts of démoniac possession, spring from ignorance and not from knowledge. They are wholly outside the range of actual human experience. No authentic case of demoniacal possession, present or past, is known to the medical profession. Knowledge destroys all such vain imaginations. Knowledge is the true *malleus maleficarum*. Try to visualise the alleged facts of the story, and you will find yourself utterly baffled in the attempt. It is grotesque and unimaginable.

Take the Gadarene case. It does not even occur to the writer of the story that the poor lunatic's organs must have been utterly diseased; that his wild condition must have been wholly

due to disease. No, no. In the conception of the writer, he is simply possessed by a strong and active devil, or devils, who may be exorcised from the patient's body, neck and crop by some exorcist—according to the superstition and ignorance of the times; so Christ is simply represented as having addressed the supposed demon thus:—"Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit. And he asked him," the narrative proceeds, "what is thy name? And he answered, my name is legion, for we are, many." (The demons were evidently swarming in the poor man's head like wasps in a nest) "And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country." (This particular swarm of demons had, it appears, a great liking for the country of Gadara.) "Now there was nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, send us into the swine that we may enter into them. And forthwith Jesus gave them leave" etc., etc. (*Mark* 5, 8-19; similarly 1, 23-25; 1, 34; 3, 11-12; 5, 8-19; 9, 25-29; 16, 17.) Try to imagine the whole scene. Does the Archbishop of Canterbury believe the story? Does the Moderator of the General Assembly of

the Church of Scotland believe it? Do the members of the Athenæum Club believe it? Do the editors of any first-class newspaper believe it? Does any man of high intelligence in this whole land, believe it?

The Apostles also are reported to have been given "power and authority over all devils," and the Apostolic Succession claim to have inherited all such power and authority. Now, do the Apostolic Succession even know of the existence of any such beings as those haunting demons? Of course, not; nor do they seem to possess power and authority over a single devil of any kind. Therefore, this whole doctrine of demons retiring into human beings as into fastnesses and places of concealment, stands in need of wiping out.

IV.—CONTRADICTIONS.

Witness again the manifest contradictions, both historical and doctrinal, to be found in the scriptures. Contrast, for example, the New Testament account of certain events in the life of the Apostle Paul. After his conversion and the miraculous restoration of his sight, we read in the Acts that "straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues;" that he "increased

the more in strength and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus ;" that "after many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him ;" that being apprised of this, he managed to escape by the assistance of his friends. This narrative further leads us to suppose that he then went to Jerusalem, where "he assayed to join himself with the disciples," who, however, were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple ; that to overcome those scruples, "Barnabas took him and brought him to the Apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way ;" that He "was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem ;" and that he "spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Grecians." (*Acts 9, 20-29.*) On the other hand, the Apostle himself in his Epistle to the Galatians writes thus : When it pleased God "to reveal His son in me. . . . I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were Apostles before me, but I went into Arabia and returned again into Damascus ; then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter and abode with him fifteen days ; but other of the

Apostles saw I none save James the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you, before God I lie not. Afterwards, I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and was unknown by face unto the Churches of Judaea which were in Christ." (*Gal.* 1, 15-22.) Now, as the critics have noticed, both of these narratives cannot possibly be true; one of them is necessarily false or incorrect. Therefore the fatuity of speaking of them as the "Word of God," must be manifest, almost, to the weakest intelligence. It needs not a university education to enable us to come to this conclusion. All that is required is a modest, and easily-accessible education in Godly Common Sense.

Then, even such persons as claim to be inspired, cannot properly be granted the privilege of teaching contradictory doctrines. The Apostle Paul, for example, teaches in many parts of his writings,—I apprehend rightly, that God will render unto every man "according to his deeds"; that "the doers of the law shall be justified" (*Rom.* 2, 6-15); but proceed a little further in the same Epistle, and to the consternation of all sensible men and the Age-long

confusion of Christendom, we find him fatuously and contradictorily declaring that "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight;" that "a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." (*Rom.* 3, 20, 28; so *Eph.* 2, 8-9, and other places.) The theologians try to get over these contradictions with foolish talk about old and new "dispensations." But I submit that there never was a "new dispensation," and that there cannot be a "new dispensation," in the Moral Law any more than there can be a new dispensation in arithmetic. Further, I submit that it is an insult to the Deity, or that it betrays a most contemptible conception of His Divine Majesty, to suppose that He found it necessary to introduce amendments into His Legislative System. But Christ Himself is absolutely decisive on this point against theological "orthodoxy,"—"Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily, I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (*Matt.* 5, 17-18.) Now, obviously, such contradictions are intolerable even in an inspired man. We cannot put

up with them. They have, undoubtedly, darkened and confounded Christianity and Christendom for Ages, and Christendom should no longer put up with them. It surpasses the ingenuity even of the Apostle Paul to sit in two canoes and paddle them in opposite directions at one and the same moment. The most enterprising and venerable of Apostles should not undertake such a task. Therefore, there can be no impiety in saying that those contradictory passages are not the "Word of God." Nay, I hold it to be impiety little short of blasphemy, to call them the "Word of God."

V.—IMPRACTICABLE COUNSELS.

In the next place, I am afraid that the Scriptures contain some utterly impracticable counsels, if those counsels be literally taken. Take the following, for example: "If any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also; and whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away." (*Matt.* 5, 40-42.) "Go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor." (*Ib.* 19, 21.) Now, I

believe most religiously in the potential grandeur of the human mind. It is great enough to reflect the universe. Our chief task should be to convince men—even the humblest, that they may live glorious lives; that they are possessed of boundless potentialities. The ambitions of Napoleon were petty and parochial compared to those of an enlightened spiritual warrior. God has furnished the human mind with potentialities so high, that, within reasonable limits, there seems to be nothing too great for it to attempt; the potential greatness of man cannot be too much dwelt upon. "In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God created He him." (*Gen.* 5, 1.) I wish that the clergy would notice this, and theologise accordingly. Though so poor and weak, and Time-bound and Place-bound, and hemmed-in and caged-up, we are yet capable of thinking the highest thoughts, holding the loftiest aspirations and living the sublimest of lives; of exhibiting the virtues of the Archangel, whilst tenanted a body that is of kindred with the moth; so that if the foregoing precepts and counsels were reasonable, man would be found trying to obey them, Herculean though the practice would be.

But, as a simple matter of fact, neither do men try to obey such precepts in their literality, *not have they any intention even the most pious, amongst them*, of attempting to do so. The reason is simple. In a world of sin and ignorance, the precepts, *as they stand*, seem to be utterly impracticable. Even already, the whines and the general resources of beggary are exploited by rogues and villains to such an extent that it has been found necessary to create a Society for the *protection of the charitable*; and it is generally recognised that there is no sphere of activity in which sound judgment is more requisite than in the granting and distribution of material charity. The mere giving of credit to the poor, ruins thousands of poor little shopkeepers, and degrades poverty itself. Indeed it seems likely that any general attempt to observe the alleged Christian precepts, which we are considering, in their literality, would lead to an utter subversion of Law and Government.

It is further obvious that those precepts are utterly opposed to the practice of Providence, who, presumably, by one turn of the wrist, so to speak, could supply all the material wants of man; but whose general method of administra-

tion seems to be only to pay the labourer in some way or other (not necessarily in coin) for work done; which is undoubtedly the most hopeful method of Moral Government. We do not read that Israel made any great progress in the manna and quail period. Nay, when Providence was especially kind to Jeshurun, we read that Jeshurun simply "waxed fat and kicked." (*Deut.* 32, 15.) Such is human nature as we, at present, are acquainted with it. Universal almsgiving would probably end in universal spiritual death—in the spiritual death of the recipients especially.

Even if Providence had so arranged it that we could all have buttoned our waistcoats with kohinoors and been carried about in gorgeous carriages drawn by cream-coloured ponies, gorgeously caparisoned, it would clearly have been of no high account to us—probably the very reverse.

We are therefore driven to hope that Christ did not actually utter some of those precepts which are attributed to him by the sacred writers, and to the conclusion that they are not the "Word of God."

VI.—THE OLD TESTAMENT MISQUOTED AND MISSAPPLIED BY WRITERS OF THE NEW.

Again we have serious fault to find with the frequent endeavours made by the New Testament writers to wrest certain parts of the Old Testament into a conformity with their own thoughts and fancies. For example, according to Matthew, Joseph and Mary were told to take the child Jesus into Egypt in order that he might escape from the murderous tyranny of Herod, and that they were to keep him there until the death of Herod—why? "That it might be fulfilled," declares the writer, "which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son." (*Matt.* 2, 13-15.) Now, turning up the reference to the prophet, we find the following passage: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him and called my son out of Egypt." (*Hosea* 11, 1.) Obviously, the passage is retrospective and regards Israel as a nation; and has, consequently, no reference to Christ whatsoever.

Or take the passage about Rachel weeping for her children. In Jeremiah it is written—"A

voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rahel, weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children because they were not," *et seq.* (*Jer.* 31, 15-17.) With the most childish simplicity, the writer of Matthew's Gospel wrests and applies this passage to describe the grief of the Jewish mothers over the alleged "massacre of the innocents." (*Matt.* 2, 16-18.) In respect of this particular vice, Matthew is a great offender. It is therefore preposterous to speak of his work, as a whole, as the "Word of God."

VII. — OBSCURITY OF UTTERANCE, AND EXTRAVAGANCE OF STATEMENT.

In many parts, also, the sacred writers positively excel in obscurity of utterance and in extravagance of statement. Why, for example, should John the Baptist have been identified with Elijah? (*Matt.* 11, 14; 17, 11-12.) What sense is there in it? What valuable meaning, or, indeed, what meaning at all, can be attached to the identification? Again, what tittle of evidence or authority had Paul for saying that "all things were created by Christ and for him." (*Col.* 1, 16-17.) Or that God had "chosen us in

him before the foundation of the world?" (*Eph.* 1, 4; 3, 9-11; *II. Tim.* 1, 9.) And what useful sense is there in such sayings after they are said? None at all, I venture to say. As the Apostle, as far as we can discover, knew absolutely nothing more than other people about the foundation of the world, either as to the time or the manner of it, I beg respectfully to express the opinion that he should not have spoken so familiarly about it; nay, I would most humbly suggest that as he was apparently in a state of utter ignorance touching either the modus of the foundation of the world, or the circumstances in which it was founded, it was his sacred duty to have frankly left the subject alone. By the cryptic talk in which he has ventured to indulge on such subjects, he has abundantly stunned and stupefied the world, but in nowise enlightened it.

Again,—he writes that we are "by nature the children of wrath" (*Eph.* 2, 3); that we are "sold under sin" (*Rom.* 7, 14), and so forth. Is it credible? Who gave him a commission to write such things? Surely, not God. Nay, I think we must maintain it to be immoral and utterly dishonouring to God to say that we are

"by nature the children of wrath." What congruity is there between such a notion and that of "Our Father in Heaven"? Think of the salvation of the Human Race being made to depend upon such passages as *Romans* 9, 6-13! Think of the utter travesty and distortion of fact and doctrine set forth in verses 30-32! Consider the statement—"If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, *and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved*" (*Rom.* 10, 9)—which actually makes your salvation to hinge upon an act of pure credulity, and soberly ask yourself—"Is the thing credible?" Who commissioned the Apostle Paul, or the person writing in his name, to talk of remnants "according to the election of grace?" (*Ib.* 11, 5) Who inspired him to argue against human works? (*Ib.* 11, 6-7)—since it is incredible and inconceivable that man can enjoy exalted bliss otherwise than through his works. It is exceedingly hard to believe that the Divine Being ever inspired any such doctrines. Or carefully read *Romans* 7, 1-13. What man, woman, or child in the whole world is able to distil any sound sense out of it? Or to find any light in it? Now, it appears

to me that to "give light unto all that are in the house," should be the first aim of the theologian.

"Forasmuch then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood," writes the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." - (Heb. 2, 14-15.) Now, without disputing the good intentions, the noble purposes of the writer of such a passage, let any plain and unsophisticated man try to find any valuable sense in it, or indeed any clear sense at all, unless he, in the first place, reduces it from tortuous metaphor into plain speech, and, I rather think that he will lose his labour. In any event, this kind of obscure utterance is quite alien to the simplicity which we should always expect to find in anything entitled to be called the "Word of God."

Or take the following passage:—In Christ also, he writes, "Ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands *in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ*. Buried with him in

baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God who hath raised him from the dead . . . and *having spoiled principalities and powers he made a show of them openly triumphing over them in it.*" (Col. 2, 10-15.) Notice the metaphorical obscurity, the gasping incoherency of the whole passage. What plain man can derive any satisfaction from it? How can this be a Gospel for all people? Surely we insult God when we ascribe such passages to His inspiration.

The Apostle writes to Timothy:—"I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God which is in thee by *the putting on of my hands.*" (II. Tim. 1, 6.) It was a fairly large assumption, certainly. "I wonder if Timothy was quite certain that he had received such a gift? Or what good purpose was to be achieved by speaking of Christ as having "abolished death?" (Ib. 1, 10.) Or, passing on to the Book of Revelations, what shall we do with a passage like the following:—"Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred three score and six?" (Rev. 13,

18.) What advantage is it to us to say that it refers to Nero? Does God propound conundrums? Think of the thousands of foolish volumes which such passages have produced. Think of the wide spread wreckage of human brains which they have occasioned—of the great numbers of crazy people who, by such sayings, have been made crazier than they were before. And yet, to this moment, such passages—not excepting this ridiculous conundrum, are officially labelled and received by all the “orthodoxies,” as the positive “Word of God”! *This* is the proceeding to which we must object. Let the writings under consideration be attributed to the authors to whom they can be traced, if, indeed, their authorship be traceable, and the task worth the labour; but for the Love of God, do not let us call them the “Word of God.”

VIII.—SCRIPTURAL ERROR.

Or what shall we make of such passages as the following:—“Immediately after the tribulation of those days,” Christ is represented as saying, “Shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall

from Heaven, and the powers of the Heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in Heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds from one end of Heaven to the other. Now, learn a parable of the fig-tree; when his branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, *This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled.*" : (Matt. 24, 29-34; Mark 13, 24-30; Luke 21, 25-32.) Now, although we are living nearly nineteen hundred years after the time when, according to the prophesy, those stupendous events should have taken place, yet, as a simple matter of fact, there is no record that anything of the kind has taken place. Therefore we are driven by reason in its most absolute mood, to the conclusion that Christ never uttered those words; or that if he did utter them, his prophesy was not fulfilled.

For my part, I would much rather accept the former alternative, namely, that he never uttered them, than the latter,—namely, that his prophecies were not fulfilled. In any case, it is impossible that the passage, or any passage like it, can be accepted by any capable and honest man as the "Word of God."

"Whosoever is born of God," says John, "doth not commit sin, for his seed remaineth in him and *he cannot sin*, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil." (1. *John* 3, 9-10; also 5, 18.) Consider it. Millions belonging to the various orthodoxies profess implicitly or explicitly, that they are "born of God." Now, how many of all these millions do not sin? How many of them are even prepared to say that they do not sin? The Apostle Paul regarded himself as a very great sinner. Could John himself have declared, in sobriety of judgment, that *he* could not sin? The statement is far too sweeping. If it were true, we should see the world divided into two clearly defined classes—saints, simply, and sinners;—the Army of God and the Army of the Devil. Unhappily or happily; such representations of the human state have no true

likeness to the facts of the case; and therefore, they can form no part of the "Word of God"—which I reverently think must be free not only from all error but from all exaggeration. I reiterate that it is impiety and not piety to accept such sayings as the "Word of God."

IX.—THE CHRISTIAN MIRACLES.

I have already briefly examined one of the Supernatural stories of the Old Testament and found it to be a tissue of incredibilities, insulting not only to the common sense of man, but to the Majesty of God. What is to be said of the alleged Christian miracles? We shall now briefly consider this question.

The poet Dante writing in favour of the dogma of the inspiration of the Scriptures, and striving to establish the credibility of the alleged miracles, argues thus in the *Paradise*. The colloquy is with Peter.

"Wherefore holdest thou (asks Peter) that each,
The elder proposition and the new,
Which so persuade thee, are the voice of
Heaven?"

'The works that followed evidence their truth.'

I (Dante) answered: 'Nature did not make for
these

The iron hot, or on her anvil mould them.'

'Who voucheth to thee of the works themselves?'
Was the reply, 'that they in very deed
Are that they purport? None hath sworn so to
thee.'

'That all the world,' said I, 'should have been
turned

To Christian and no miracle been wrought,
Would in itself be such a miracle,
The rest were not a hundredth part so great.'"

This is, practically, the argument of the best orthodox writers. Butler, for example, expresses it thus:—"The Hebrews naturally acknowledged and worshipped the Maker of Heaven and Earth in such a manner, when the rest of the world was sunk in idolatry, as rendered them in fact the peculiar people of God. And this so remarkable an establishment and preservation of natural religion among them seems to add some peculiar credibility to the historical evidences for the miracles of Moses and the Prophets, because these miracles are a full satisfactory account of the event, which plainly wants to be accounted for, and cannot otherwise."

Again—"These miracles are a satisfactory account of those events, of which no other satisfactory account can be given, nor any account at

all but what is imaginary merely, and invented. It is to be added that the most obvious, the most easy and direct account of this history, how it came to be written and received in the world as a true history, is that it really is so, nor can any other account of it be so easy and direct."

(*Analogy*. Pt. II., C. 7. Also Paley, Pt. III., C. 8.) And hosts of less distinguished writers and preachers have taken up the same argument.

This is probably the strongest argument that can be advanced in favour of the orthodox view of the miracles. Originally I was disposed to think that it was sound, and had every inclination to accept it; but on fuller consideration, I feel bound to reject it in so far as it relies on the authenticity of the alleged physical miracles, which I now regard as a most embarrassing and unhappy element in the Gospel narratives. Let us glance at some of those narratives.

"Jesus went about all Gallilee teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria, and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and

those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those which had the palsy, and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judæa, and from beyond Jordan."

(*Matt.* 4, 23-25, and many other passages.)

Notice closely the alleged wide range, the all-embracing character, the far-reaching fame, of these stupendous works. Mark is equally emphatic regarding them. "When they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him, and ran through the whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was. And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country; they laid their sick in the streets and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment, and as many as touched him were made whole." (*Mark* 6, 54-56, and many other passages.) Try to realise and to visualise such stories, and you will be disposed to exclaim—"Save us from our irrational friends!"

So many and so mighty are his alleged works that he himself is represented as upbraiding the

cities "wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee Chorazin!" he is represented as exclaiming, "Woe unto thee Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes;" *et seq.* (*Matt.* 11, 20-24.) Briefly consider the invincible objections which must be taken to such stories.

(1) Firstly, the Gospels themselves flatly, though only implicitly, contradict them. According to Matthew certain of the Scribes and Pharisees said, "Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the Prophet Jonas;" (*Matt.* 12, 38-39, which is repeated in the same work, 16, 1-4); whilst Mark is, if possible, still more emphatic upon this point:—"The Pharisees," he says, "began to question him, seeking from him a sign from Heaven, tempting him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, *there shall no sign be given unto this*

generation;" from which passages it is quite clear that the authors of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark as we now have them, had for the moment quite forgotten the stupendous wonders which they had just been recounting, or had not been discerning enough to observe the irreconcilable contrariety of the passages under notice. Thus whilst there is a most embarrassing plethora of miracles to be found in many parts of the gospel narratives, there is not only a most contradictory and embarrassing absence of such miracles in other parts, but as in the passages just quoted, an implicit denial of them.

(2) Secondly, these miraculous stories must be objected to, on moral grounds. They are non-moral phenomena. Now let it be observed that the moral character and influence, whether in God or man, are the highest conceivable: there-

1 *Mark 8, 11-12*; see also *John 2, 18*; *6, 30*. The curing of the man sick of the palsy (*Mat. 9, 2-8*; *Mark 2, 2-12*; *Luke 5, 18-26*) offers a particularly flagrant instance of contradiction. "That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power. . . . He saith to the sick of the palsy, I say unto thee, Arise . . . and immediately he arose . . . and went forth before them all, insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, we never saw it on this fashion." It is also affirmed that Herod had heard of Him and His mighty works (*Mat. 14, 1*; *Mark 6, 14-16*; *Luke 9, 7-9*). See also his message to John (*Mat. 11, 4-5*).

fore, we yield Christ the highest conceivable honour when we say that his work succeeded not by miracle at all, but by virtue alone of its rational and moral excellence; whilst we do actually detract from its intrinsic greatness when we say that it owed any part of its success to miracles. How are you going to make a man skilful or learned, or wise, or good? Only by inducing or persuading him to draw upon his own powers. Neither skill, nor learning, nor wisdom, nor goodness, can be imposed upon him from the outside without his own active co-operation. Man, if he is to be saved at all in any high sense, must be saved by moral suasion. Improvement in any high thing is mainly effected by personal effort. Indeed, Christ himself practically declares this in the great parable of Dives and Lazarus. "I pray thee," says Dives to Abraham, "that thou wouldest send him (Lazarus) to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they

will repent. And he said unto him, *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.*" (Luke 16, 27-31.) This passage grants our whole case. Salvation according to this great parable of Christ, cannot be accomplished by miraculous interventions—not though one "rose from the dead." Moral salvation can only be accomplished by moral means—which are the highest means. It is only by this rendering of the matter that we can do full justice to the Majesty of Christ.

(3) Thirdly, it must be objected that miracles would introduce an inconstant and capricious element into the Providence of God. To-day, miracles; to-morrow, no miracles.

(4) In the fourth place, it is to be observed that the alleged miracles were not followed by such results as would naturally have sprung from them had they actually taken place: for consider the stupendous proportions of those alleged miracles. Try to realise them as true; and then consider what their natural effect would, almost necessarily, have been. Notice, let it be repeated, the sweeping statements that are made regarding them. Christ's fame goes through-

out Syria. They bring to him all kinds of sick people. He is followed by great multitudes from all parts. He heals all of them. As many as touched him were made whole—indeed the patient has only to touch the hem of his garment to be healed.¹ In a word, all Syria in those days must have presented a clean bill of health. To make the case still more incredible, he is represented as endowing his apostles with powers similar to his own (*Matt.* 10, 1-8; *Mark* 6, 7-13); whilst in *Luke* we are further informed that he appointed and sent forth "other seventy also" with like powers; which seventy duly returned with joy to their Master, saying that "even the devils are subject to us through thy name." (*Luke* 10, 1-19.) Now, if such wonders really had been accomplished, it would have been impossible for us to have escaped the conclusion that all ordinary spectators would have been constrained thereby to pay homage to the power of Christ; that all his enemies would not only have been mortally afraid of him, but would have grovelled in the very dust before him; that

¹ In Gennesaret they "brought unto Him all that were diseased, and besought Him that they might only touch the hem of His garment; and as many as touched Him were made perfectly whole" (*Mat.* 14, 35-36).

only the most hopeless of dunces could have rejected him. Suppose such events happening in the England, say, of to-day—a being landing on our shores and straightway providing universal remedies for all diseases. Obviously such a one would have the Empire at his feet in a week—including even the dunces. So would it have been in the old days. Not merely Palestine, but the Roman Empire at large, must have succumbed to a person who was in truth accomplishing the stupendous works attributed to him in the Gospels. The fame of them would have spread like wildfire. It could not have been otherwise; and yet authentic history knows absolutely nothing of such works. The obvious conclusion is that the stories are not true.

The same invincible objections apply to such passages as Acts 3, 1-11; 4, 13-22; 5, 12-19; and to the case of Tabitha, 9, 36-42.² Let it be

² See also the incredible and unimaginable stories told of Paul (*Acts* 19, 2-7; 19, 13-16). We are even told that "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul, so that from his body were brought unto the sick, handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them" (*Acts* 19, 11-12). If such stories had been true, the travels of the noble Apostle would almost certainly have resolved themselves into a long series of mere triumphal progresses. I submit that the man whose handkerchiefs or aprons can cure diseases, may smile at all kinds of earthly potentates.

repeated, I question not the *possibility* of miracles: God may do anything not involving contradictions—breaches of necessary truth. But for any alleged miracle, ancient or modern, I demand before believing it, and shall continue to demand, the most absolute and unimpeachable historical testimony that it did actually take place. Nay, I shall not be able to believe it until this unimpeachable evidence is before me. Duty requires me to adopt this reasonable course of action. I dishonour God and do injustice to myself if I refuse to follow this reasonable course of action. Also, as we have seen, we must be more than sceptical about the economy of miracles. They would interfere with Moral Government and work a breach in Moral Law. Man if he is to be morally saved—and Moral Salvation is the only cure for human woes, must be saved by moral suasion and not by miraculous force. I grant, indeed, that the Divinest of messages, unless it came quite visibly from the Gods, and was attested by great natural convulsions, would probably make no impression upon the case-hardened, custom-toughened sordid soul of the secularist. Nothing, I daresay, but pure miracle could cure

him of his gross World-Blindness. But what then? The man who can only be saved—*i.e.*, spiritually reformed, by miracle, is, I fear, scarcely worth saving. Further, a miracle may even give rise to positive injustice. Take the case of Tabitha. She has nobly lived and nobly laboured, and has at length gone the way of all flesh. She has presumably suffered all the ordinary sorrows of life and all the ordinary apprehensions and pains of death; she rests from her labours, and the best Christian hope is that her works do follow her. The best Christian belief is that it is far better for the Christian whose work is done, to die than to live. In these circumstances, why should poor Tabitha have been brought back to earth—why tied again to earthly service? And presumably made to endure for a second time, the ills incident to our mortal state, together with the repeated agonies of death? And all this in addition to the huge objections which I have already urged against the alleged miracles. We may depend upon it, I think, that the Tabitha tale is a myth. We may depend upon it that if we could call Peter into the witness-box, he would repudiate the whole story with indignation and disgust.

Thus, supposing that all the alleged miracles had actually been wrought, it would still have appeared that, as far as any high moral purpose was concerned, they had been wholly wrought in vain. Nay, worse than this—in the minds of thinking men they have mainly served to raise suspicions of bad faith or stupidity in the Gospel scribes, and darkened the divine spirit of Christianity itself with hideous bug-a-boo.

Therefore, instead of believing with Dante and Butler that the physical miracles were necessary to account for the rise of Christianity, I come to the conclusion that Christianity has been degraded by its association with the alleged miracles, and that the only true and hopeful miracle of Christianity lay, and still lies, in its spiritual super-excellence. It was far more divine to save by moral suasion and heroic example than it ever could have been to save by miraculous force.

Indeed, if we are to believe in the Divine Greatness of Christ, it is absolutely necessary for us to disbelieve in the authenticity of many parts of the New Testament writings.

X.—IMPERFECT COMPOSITIONS.

Even on the score of literary composition, I can find no reason why the scriptures should be called the "Word of God." Take such a poem as the song of Solomon. Everybody knows that it contains some most exquisite patches of poetry; indeed it may be granted that the whole work is pervaded by a finely poetic spirit; but all judicious critics, I believe, would grant that it is loaded with metaphor so incongruous, extravagant, vague, and incoherent for the most part, that taking the poem as a whole, they are unable to make even a satisfactory meaning out of it. Nobody, it seems, is able to make a satisfactory meaning out of it, though it has exercised and troubled the wits of men for ages. Therefore, on what rational grounds, sacred or secular, should that composition be taken for the "Word of God"?

In view, then, of these many objections which should be taken against the dogma of the infallibility of scripture: (1) The absurdity of some of the scripture stories, (2) The barbarity of some of its doctrines, (3) The preposterous demonology to which its writers are committed,

(4) The contradictions and inconsistencies of doctrine and fact which are found in them, (5) The impracticable counsels which sometimes appear in them, (6) The misquotations and misapplications of Old Testament writings which are sometimes made by writers in the New Testament, (7) The obscurity and extravagance of many passages, (8) The positive errors of fact which they contain, (9) The general character of incredibility attaching to the whole tale of physical miracles, and (10) The imperfection of some of the compositions even as literary works—considering all these objections in a resolutely scientific spirit, we are not merely driven to the conclusion that the scriptures as a whole, are not the "Word of God," but to the far stronger conclusion that it is nothing short of folly, and insolence to the Divine Majesty superadded, to call them and dogmatically declare them to be the "Word of God."

Idolatry might be defined as—irrational regard for any person, place, or thing. To regard the scriptures as the very "Word of God," is blind idolatry.

Nor is any scholarship, in the ordinary sense, needed to lead us to this conclusion—neither

Hebrew, nor Sanscrit, nor Greek, nor Latin, nor Syriac, nor Arabic. No huge library is requisite; no tedious exploration of rubbish heaps. An earnest and enlightened mind brought to bear upon a copy of the Authorised Version alone—a mind which, by reason of use, has its senses exercised to discern between good and evil, has evidence and authority sufficient to condemn the dogma that the scriptures are the infallible “Word of God,” and therefore it must be a matter of the first importance to have it deleted from the standards of all the churches. The dogma has for generations and generations been a heavy incubus upon the intellect and upon the character of Christendom, and is scandalous to all the churches which retain it. It must be dissolved one day—the quicker the better.

Whilst holding these convictions it is still easy to regard the Bible, as a whole, with the profoundest esteem. Much of it is obviously the work of the most religious of men, who, in all faithfulness, are ever trying to lead us away from the secular to the sacred, from the temporal to the eternal—doing their best in their imperfect way to fix our thoughts upon divine things

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and to kindle the holiest aspirations in our hearts. Of all human works it gives us the clearest vision of God and yields grandest expression to the deepest wants of man. It tunes his mind and his heart to sacred harmonies, inspires him with illustrious hopes and strengthens him for arduous toil and heroic battle. In spite of all that may be reasonably said against it, the Book is indispensable: it remains the Book of Books.

CHAPTER IV

THE DOGMA OF THE TRINITY

PURE, resolute, uncompromising thinking is the first duty of the religious man as well as of the engineer or the mathematician. There is no impiety in pure thought, no pride in it, as a great many of our clergymen try to make us believe. On the contrary, it is a necessary element of all virtue: all virtue must be founded upon sound thinking. On the other hand, most of the religious creeds are more or less irreligious and profane, inasmuch as they are opposed to, and in rebellion against, the sacred sovereignty of thought. Reason is holy; the irrational is profane. Let us try to assert this truth and stand by it against Death and Hell, if necessary. It is a crying disgrace to the human head and an infinite reproach to nearly all the churches that they are at loggerheads—deliberate loggerheads, with reason. It is one of the vilest and most ruinous lies of the

Devil to say that reason is irreligious ;¹ and the more quickly that our clergymen realise this truth, the better will it be for all concerned. In the interests of true religion and humanity, and in the Spirit of profoundest homage to Almighty God, I maintain that our creeds should be resolutely cleansed of every vestige of fiction, of every taint of irrationality, and so rendered religious in very truth. This is one of the chief Reforms waiting for accomplishment—a Reform without which it is very questionable if any other Reform, worth speaking about, can be accomplished. A rational clergy earnestly engaged in teaching and preaching a rational theology from week to week and from day to day, would do more good to society in one year than all the

¹ Whilst trying to scorn Reason, the orthodox pretend to reject the testimony of the corporeal senses also, forgetful of that great saying—"The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them." Now, as it is incredible that our Maker furnished us with eyes and ears in order to deceive or confound us by them, or for any other purpose than to serve us as sure guides to the apprehension of material things, we cannot reject their testimony touching material things—as so many of the Sacramentarians do periodically, without bold presumption and impiety. If the testimony of our God-given corporeal senses as received and interpreted by our God-given Rational faculties, is not to be accepted, where are we to look for evidence of anything? We must all become Pyrrhonists!

secular efforts of legislators, police, scientists, inventors and philanthropists combined, are likely to accomplish in a thousand years. Reason is the great fetter-breaker, the true Revolutionist, Reformer and Renovator.

According to Plato, Socrates declared in his defence that "a life without investigation was not worth living for." (*Apology*, 28.) I think he was right. Arguing with Crito and in full view of death, he is also reported to have said:—"For I, not only now but always, am a person who will obey nothing within me but reason, according as it appears to me on mature deliberation to be best." (*Crito*, 6.) Indubitably he was right. But recognising this, how do our orthodoxies stand—how can they stand, under their loads of irrationality? In a very feeble attitude naturally.

See how nearly all the churches stand oppressed and stupefied under the dogma of the Trinity—the dogma that God is three persons in one, and one in three persons, and so forth. Let us very briefly investigate the matter. Before doing so—just a note of warning against the prejudice in favour of old, and what are called "primitive" opinions. Let it be noted

that ~~primitiveness~~ is practically of no account in the quest for truth—that all kinds of devilry, even, are of a remarkably primitive nature, and that they are no better on that account. Primitive blockheadism is no better than latter-day blockheadism; therefore, a wise man will never be in the least anxious as to whether any doctrine or dogma is primitive or unprimitive. His only care will be to determine whether it is false or true. The general recognition of this one simple rule of sense and wisdom would save the world from an infinitude of fatuous labours and from multitudes of foolish volumes.

For myself, I have almost no sympathy even with that kind of devotion which finds sanctity in the old boots of the saints, much less with those whose chief ambition seems to be to clothe themselves in primitive opinions. The clergy, unhappily, are particularly addicted to the intellectual attiring of themselves in ancient second-hand garments—"primitive" opinions. Nay, they insist on wearing them however ill-odoured they may be, and are very desirous of clothing the laity in the same kind of rags. As long as the rag can be proved to be "primitive," they assume that all is well! Obviously, they could

not make a more disastrous blunder. As long as this deadly error prevails, the spiritual health of the world is bound to be extremely bad. It is the clear duty of all who wear these pestiferous second-hand garments to divest themselves of them with alacrity and to burn them without a sigh. I think it will be found that the Creed of St. Athanasius should go with the first bundle.

In the first place, what evidence is there in favour of the dogma that there is a trinity of persons in the Deity. What evidence is there, even in the Scriptures to justify such a dogma? None at all, I should say, except it be the spurious passage in the First Epistle of John. (*I. John*, 5, 7), or in some vague utterance about baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. (*Matt.* 28, 19.)

In the second place, what is the evidence against the dogma? I should say that the evidence against the existence of a "third person" is overwhelming, even on the old false assumption that the Scriptures are the infallible "Word of God." The phrase "Holy Ghost" is, of course, of very frequent occurrence, but it is to be observed that in most, or rather in all, cases, the phrase is only intelligible as another

name for God, or as a personification of the influence or power of God. Test a few cases. "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire," (*Ib.* 3, 11) can only mean "He shall baptize you with His Holy Spirit,"—i.e., inspire you with His Holy influence, and not ceremoniously dip you in mere water. It cannot mean "He shall baptize you with the third Person of the Trinity"—which would be absolutely unintelligible. "He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon him." (*Matt.* 3, 16.) To render thus—"He saw the third Person of the Trinity descending and lighting upon him," is simply grotesque and unimaginable. To think of Christ being led up into the wilderness (*Ib.* 4, 1) by the Third Person of the Trinity is likewise grotesque and unimaginable. To render the saying, "It is the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you," (*Ib.* 10, 20) into "It is the Third Person of the Trinity which speaketh in you," is a manifest absurdity. "I will put my Spirit upon him." (*Ib.* 12, 18) cannot mean "I will put the Third Person of the Trinity upon him." "Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost," (*Luke*, 4, 1) cannot mean "Jesus being full of

the Third Person of the Trinity."—"Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit," (*Ib.* 4, 14) cannot be twisted to mean "Jesus returned in the power of the Third Person of the Trinity."—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," (*Ib.* 4, 18) cannot without absurdity be rendered "The Third Person of the Trinity is upon me." "He breathed on them and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost," (*John*, 20, 22) never meant and could not conceivably mean that he breathed the Third Person of the Trinity upon them! All such interpretations are manifestly absurd, and so with innumerable other passages.¹

Again, in his prayers, whom does Christ address? God only, of course. "Our Father, who art in Heaven," "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me" and so forth. Or take *John* 17. This whole chapter is employed in setting forth the relationship between God and Christ as Father and Son, and between them and the redeemed. The highest terms of intimacy are represented as being used by Christ towards the Father; but throughout the whole monologue, Christ either knows nothing of a "Third

¹ E.g., *John* 3, 34; 14, 26; 15, 26; *Acts* 8, 39; 9, 17; 9, 31; 10, 38; 10, 44; 1 *Thess.* 1, 5-6; etc.

Person," or if he does, he entirely ignores him, which in the circumstances would have been quite unaccountable, not to say discourteous, if he had believed that there was a "Third Person" co-equal with God.

Further, take the testimony of the Epistles: "To us," says Paul, "there is but one God. . . . and one Lord Jesus Christ"; (*I. Cor.* 8, 6.) "The head of every man is Christ . . . and the head of Christ is God"; (*Ib.* 11, 3.) "Paul an Apostle . . . by Jesus Christ and God the Father"; (*Gal.* 1, 1.) "No covetous man . . . hath any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God"; (*Eph.* 5, 5) and innumerable other passages, from which it seems to be quite clear that the idea of a "Third Person of the Trinity," or any "Trinity" at all, had never entered into the heads of the Apostles. In fact there seems to be no reasonable excuse for the dogma of the Trinity—not even upon the score of "primitiveness"—a conclusion which is supported by the fact that it was not unanimously ratified by what they call "the Church" until the Council of Constantinople, 381 A.D.: (Gibbon: *Decline and Fall*, Vol. V, p. 27) in which Council, undoubtedly, many a barbarian took his seat.

How, I wonder, would our friends who pretend to believe in theological "primitiveness," like to have their corporeal maladies diagnosed and prescribed for and operated upon, by primitive medicine-men! They suffer their souls to be sat upon by a fourth century Constantinopolitan "Church-Council." How, I wonder, would they like to have their bodies sat upon by a fourth-century Constantinopolitan Council of medical quacks! Yet, the fourth century science of medicine was not one iota more barbarous than the fourth century—or even a very much later, science of theology.

And not only does "the Church" of to-day proclaim this ridiculous dogma of the Trinity in a long rigmarole of barbarous twaddle, as a thing to be piously believed, but in a still more exceedingly barbarous spirit, it actually continues to declare and pronounce, that the person who does not believe it, "cannot be saved"!

1 E.g., in Eginhard's *History of the Translation of the Blessed Martyrs of Christ, S.S. Marcellinus and Petrus*, there are all kinds of miraculous nonsense reported as truth. Pillars and slabs and marble images exude moisture; a chest containing the bones of saints is found "moist, with the blood exuding on all sides; a paralytic man and a paralytic boy, also a palsied and deaf old man get cured by contact with certain relics, and so forth. Huxley: *Controverted Questions—The Value of Witness to the Miraculous*.

One of the greatest sins of theologians,—one of the greatest that can be committed, has lain, and still lies, in asserting to be true what they do not know to be true; and another—the greatest sin of all, in voting perdition, to all who do not credit their assertions. This is a case in point. The clergyman who periodically recites the Athanasian Creed, periodically asserts that to be true which he does not know to be true; and periodically threatens those who do not and *cannot* believe it, that they “cannot be saved.” It is a crying scandal to the churches; and as long as they retain such a dogma, it must be a disastrous obstacle to religious progress.

I am glad to think that many of the clergy themselves are rather disgusted with this part of their business—the recitation of the Athanasian nonsense; but most of them, probably, try to console themselves with the thought that it is the “voice of the Church,” and so, not to be questioned; or concuss themselves into the belief that they get over the difficulty by calling it a mystery. All such defences are resolvable into mere subterfuges. Let us try to impress upon those who adopt such defences, that the truth of which we are conscious when it is presented

to us, is our highest, deepest and most effective knowledge; that a man's knowledge is scarcely worth calling knowledge until it be ratified by his own conscious convictions.¹ If all the councils of all the churches tell me that I have no pain when I am consciously groaning under the pangs of toothache, I must believe my own consciousness rather than all the councils of all the churches. The whole bench of bishops must share this conviction with me. If they try to take refuge in mystery, I must press upon them the unquestionable truth that it is a sin to

1 Thus your consciousness of your own effort, in this world, is in all cases superior to your belief, say, of Divine Assistance—your consciousness of effort being a living fact, whereas your belief in Divine Assistance is only a deduction from facts. I say this in all religiousness. Were I, with respect to myself, to say the contrary, I should lie. Should you, with respect to yourself, say the contrary, I should doubt your veracity. Here is a clergyman officiating at a baptism. He is absolutely certain that he is repeating certain words and sprinkling water on an infant's head, but he enjoys no conscious conviction at all (whatever his hopes may be) that his words and his ritual are accompanied by Divine influences. Similarly, no man alive can be absolutely certain of the authenticity of many of our Bible stories, whilst every man is absolutely certain of the authenticity, say, of his own moral convictions.

And in view of this great truth that to be conscious of anything is to possess the surest knowledge of it, I hold that it is only the man who is doing his very best to live a righteous and holy life that has any right to talk about "Faith in God."

dogmatise beyond personal knowledge and the logical inferences derivable from that knowledge; that an agnostical conclusion is the only modest, wise and religious attitude that can be adopted in the face of mystery; that no plea of mystery can be allowed to darken or debilitate laws of Morals, which are divinely clear, positive and imperative; and that, obviously, *you cannot hang a man justly, much less damn him, upon a point of mystery.* The whole bench of bishops must also share this conviction with me. Just reflect on the matter for a moment, in the sacred light of common sense. Can you honestly think for a moment that the glorious Deity is even very much concerned as to what theory any poor mortal may have formed as to the composition of His personality—a subject upon which he has actually no data? Is such a possibility as this even conceivable? And yet “the Church” threatens us with damnation if we cannot profess to accept its blind dogma on the subject! Just think of God being represented as bent upon our eternal destruction, if we don’t profess to accept a blind dogma touching the composition of His Personality! Think of Christ being similarly represented! O my ecclesiastical

brothers, you might as well tell me that my eternal hopes centre in bagging a hippogriff as in swallowing your Athanasian Creed. I submit that salvation cannot possibly have anything to do with that barbarous document—beyond rejecting it; that it is insulting and degrading to God and man; that it is wild and audacious impiety to make any man's welfare, either temporal or eternal, depend upon what view, or absence of view, he may entertain on the psychological or pneumatological composition of the Deity.

THE DOGMA MUST BE REJECTED.

True religion must be Catholic—*i.e.* It must appeal to every intelligent and noble soul at least. Now, none of the orthodoxies appeal to every intelligent and noble soul—which must be patent to every observer: therefore, none of the orthodoxies are Catholic. But Virtue appeals to every intelligent and noble soul as the highest thing conceivable; consequently, Virtue should be accepted as the basis of religion.

The churches have no enemies worth speaking about, when they cultivate and preach Virtue. If they wish to disarm outside opposition, let

them cultivate and preach the necessity of earnest thought and noble virtue.

It is the first duty of the adult individual, lay or clerical, to think for himself,—to think at first hand. Thinking is a noble occupation. The moment that a man begins to think honestly for himself, he begins to get rid of all such rubbish as the Athanasian Creed. If people at large could only be induced to do this—to think earnestly for themselves, it would soon put a fresh complexion upon life. Never would another mass be said or sung; never would the Athanasian Creed be again recited seriously; never again would any one of the irrational church dogmas be found obscuring the issues of life. It would gradually help us to dispense, I believe, even with police forces and criminal courts.

CHAPTER V.

THE DOGMA OF SUBSTITUTION

EVERY conscious or unconscious advocate or defender of false opinions should consider gravely that he is a nuisance ; that the more successful he may be in propagating his false opinions, the greater a nuisance does he become. He should consider solemnly that his falsehood, if it concern great matters, may be infinitely more harmful to society than a bad system of drainage with its attendant plagues. It is with this great responsibility in view that all serious writers should take up their pens. Truth is all-purifying, all-vivifying ; falsehood is all-debasing, all-corrupting, soul-enslaving.

" He is the freeman whom the truth makes free,
And all are slaves besides."

Truth works in the interests of Life ; falsehood is the chief promoter of Death. The debater should be as scrupulously honest with his words as the right cashier with his cash. Dishonest traffic in words is far more ruinous to the highest

interests of Society than the dishonest handling of cash: so immense is the importance of truth.

This fact—the immense importance of truth, is not sufficiently realised amongst us. People do not take it home to themselves with sufficient earnestness. Nay, there is even a foolish notion current that with regard to church matters especially, it is a pretty fancy to be rather vague and not very serious about them.

Thus amongst those who wish well to the churches and who still adhere to them, there are many whose orthodoxy is but a superficial and luke-warm adherence to church-dogmas, a conventional compliance with church rites and ceremonies—compliances and adherences which carry no heart-conviction with them.

A vague, unthinking, insincere compliance even with old usages is an error. You cannot act properly in any matter unless you have some clear understanding of it, and some earnest purpose with regard to it. This, it seems, is quite obvious. No man, at all events, disputes the proposition in any secular walk of life.

Now, just try to think of any instance in which you might properly and advantageously act in a matter without any understanding of it at all!

The feat is impossible. Neither clergyman nor layman should act anywhere without some clear understanding of the business in hand.

Yet this most Godly precept is transgressed in the churches every day. The clergy are continually asking us to save our souls on principles which neither they nor we understand!—nay,

1. Notice the prodigious general antagonism existing on this point between Christ and the theologians. Christ does not seem to have said that His Gospel was something "hard to be understood," but rather that it was a Gospel exceedingly simple, intended for all earnest and devout persons,—a message for all people who were prepared to make an honest use of the faculties which God had given them. He was spoken of originally as a "Light to lighten the Gentiles." He Himself is reported to have declared that He had come to preach the Gospel to the poor and deliverance to the captives. Paul, on the other hand, frequently treats the Gospel as if it were not only very "hard to be understood" (as Peter said, v. 2 Peter, 3-16), but positively mysterious (e.g., 1 Tim., 3, 9; 3, 16); thus, so far obscuring and frustrating the simple and sublime message of Christ. In this unhappy respect, he has been closely followed by most theologians—who have written tens of thousands of arid volumes and preached millions of arid sermons in vain endeavour to expound some of his confused theories; whilst the simple and convincing Gospel of Christ—the Gospel of love and reasonable conduct towards God and man, and the right appraising of the things of Heaven and Earth, has been largely neglected by them. As a practical outcome of the whole matter, they tell us to get baptized and confirmed, and so on—to avail ourselves of the ordinances of the Church; whilst with regard to our intellectual attitude, they say—"Only believe." I would advise them to try this policy, say, on stone-breaking.

even on principles which are wholly irrational and wholly subversive of human dignity. In fact the central theory of most of the orthodoxies seems to be this, that Heaven is prepared for those alone who believe, or pretend to believe, anything that is told them by their clergies; and thousands of the laity seem to yield a blind compliance with the theory.

Now, no clergyman should ever dare to go into a pulpit with a message of stupidity. No clergyman should ever go into a pulpit without striving to deliver a message of some high and quite intelligible kind, to his congregation; without striving to inculcate some rational and noble doctrine and to inspire some noble conduct in accordance therewith. How is this to be done under the dogma of Salvation by Substitution?

Let us take this great dogma, which is the corner-stone of all the orthodoxies, and let us, in all sincerity, and sobriety, examine it in utter confidence that to expose it to the severest tests of thought is not only the most reasonable, but the most religious thing we can do with it.

I.—WHAT MAY BE SAID FOR THE DOGMA.

In the first place, what is there to be said in excuse of the dogma? Only this, I think: There are some expressions in Scripture which authorise, and, at least, give countenance to it. The son of man came, we are told, "to give his life a ransom for many." (*Matt.* 20, 28.) "This is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for many, for the remission of sins." (*Ib.* 26, 28.) "I am the living bread which came down from Heaven. If any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (*John*, 6, 51.) "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed and my blood drink indeed." (*Ib.* 6, 53-55.) Obviously these sayings are highly metaphorical; but we have also in John such passages as the following:—"I lay down my life for the sheep"; (*Ib.* 10, 15.) "I give unto them eternal life." (*Ib.* 10, 28.)

The dogma, however, is taught most distinctly

in some of the Epistles—especially in those of Paul. “Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him” (*Rom.* 5, 9.) “By the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” (*Ib.* 5, 18.) “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.” (*Ib.* 3, 25; and corresponding passages). Thus, according to the Apostle Paul, it appears that Almighty God can forgive nothing until He has been “propitiated” in some way or other, whilst poor weak man is commanded to forgive everybody and everything that sins against him, without any propitiation, at all. In other words, the Apostle imposes a higher, more generous and more difficult code of morals upon man than upon God. The same curious theory seems to be implied in other passages of the New Testament. (*E.g.*, *I. John*, 2, 2.) Accepting all such passages in the sense most favourable to the dogma of salvation by substitution, and duly reciting them, we have said all that can be said in favour of that dogma.

II.—WHAT MUST BE SAID AGAINST THE DOGMA.

In the next place, what is there to be said against the dogma?

(1) Firstly, *Such passages as I have quoted in favour of the dogma are implicitly contradicted and condemned a thousand-and-one times by the same scriptures.* Take a few passages: "They shall justify the righteous and condemn the wicked" (*Deut.* 5, 1); "Thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous" (*Ps.* 5, 12); "God is angry with the wicked every day" (*Ps.* 7, 11); "Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous" (*Ps.* 33, 1); "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly" (*Ps.* 84, 11); "The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life" (*Prov.* 10, 11); "The lips of the righteous feed many;" (*Prov.* 10, 21); "The fear of the wicked shall come upon him, but the desire of the righteous shall be granted" (*Prov.* 10, 24); "As the whirlwind passeth on, so is the wicked no more, but the righteous is an everlasting foundation" (*Prov.* 10, 25); and anybody might profitably read the whole of Chapters XI. and XII. on the same subject. Their one theme is the glory of the righteous, the baseness of the wicked. Not

only so: in these writings the dogma of substitution or justification is condemned, as it were by anticipation, in the most explicit manner:—"He that justifieth the wicked and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord" (*Prov.* 17, 15); "It is not good to accept the person of the wicked; to overthrow the righteous in judgment" (*Prov.* 18, 5); "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (*Prov.* 21, 3). Nor does the dogma of substitution find any more favour with the Prophets:—"Thou most upright dost weigh the path of the just" (*Is.* 26, 7); "The work of righteousness shall be peace" (*Is.* 32, 17); "If there be any one that executeth judgment and seeketh the truth. . . I will pardon" Jerusalem (*Jer.* 5, 1); "If ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour. . . then will I cause you to dwell in this place" (*Ib.* 7, 3-8). Study also the whole of the 18th chapter of Ezekiel. Indeed it may be taken generally, that none of the Old Testament writers worth speaking about, know any good way of propitiating omnipotence but by righteousness.

So is it mainly with the New Testament writers. Christ, for example, is represented not merely as acknowledging the existence of the righteous, but as setting forth their blessedness: "Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled" (*Matt.* 5, 6); "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for their's is the Kingdom of Heaven" (*Ib.* 5, 10); but study the whole sermon closely. "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, because . . . ye garnish the sepulchres of the righteous" (*Ib.* 23, 29-35); "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun" (*Ib.* 13, 43); "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal" (*Ib.* 25, 46.) In short, Christ seems to hold out no hope to any but the righteous. He himself even speaks of "just persons which need no repentance" (*Luke* 15, 7.) He himself plainly tells us that the Angels of Heaven rejoice over the sinner "that repenteth." Nowhere does he speak of them as rejoicing over a sinner in search of a substitute—which were but to add infamy to sin. Or turn to the parable of the Prodigal Son, and you will find that it utterly destroys the whole hypothesis and

theory of substitution, and sets forth the true scheme of the Christian Gospel in its divine beauty and simplicity. Man wanders away, as it were, from the Divine Father, and wastes his substance in all kinds of sins, vanities, and unworthy pursuits. One day he bethinks himself what a miserable life he is leading, and what a wretched creature he is; and, repenting of his sins and his follies, turns to God with prayerful heart, determined, if possible, to amend his way of life. This is the return of the Prodigal. God sees him while he is yet a great way off, receives him and rejoices over him, as also do the Angels of Heaven. This parable seems to have embodied the very pith of the Gospel of Christ. It is the true allegory of salvation. Whoever reads it may understand, and turn unto life.

So in the Gospel according to John, Christ is represented as saying: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (*John* 13, 34-35.) Herein is the kernel of Christianity. Everything else is husk. If the Churches would

frankly accept it thus, there would be no heretics. The Churches could properly and advantageously unite in this doctrine, and adjourn the discussion of all doubtful questions, say for a few thousand years at least.

But even the Apostle Paul implicitly and happily contradicts his great dogma of substitution:—"Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another; for every man shall bear his own burden,"—an admission which clearly renders the dogma of substitution preposterous

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not." (*Gal. 6, 4-9.*)

"Flee also youthful lusts; but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, etc." (*II. Tim. 2, 22-25.*) What a mighty pity that he should ever have darkened and confused these glorious counsels by the dogma of substitution. Peter likewise speaks with no uncertain voice: "Above all things have fervent charity among your-

selves, for charity" (not substitution, be at observed) "shall cover the multitude of sins" (I. *Peter*, 4, 8); and so with all the others. Personal purity, personal meekness, personal mercifulness, personal charity, personal righteousness, personal holiness—such are the virtues which the scriptures for the most part require of us, and against these there is no law: thus the scriptural passages which teach salvation by substitution are utterly contradicted and overwhelmed by the hundred-fold more numerous passages which require of us the most strenuous self-endeavour.

(2) But, secondly, *the dogma is on many grounds, utterly condemned by Reason.*

(A) To begin with, *the dogma of Substitution is contrary to the Moral Law.* We have all our *a priori* principles, including the ethical, at first hand; reported facts we can only have at second hand. Consequently, it is clear that no reported fact can compete with a first-hand principle—not even if the twelve Apostles be the reporters. Thus, in the present case, no report of a substitutionary sacrifice can compete with the principle that substitution is impossible in Moral Law. The Sinner must, by Nature, bear in his own

soul the penalty of his own sins. Second persons may sometimes remedy the material or external mischief which the Sinner's Sin brings upon himself and others, but no second person can relieve the Sinner of the reflex spiritual evil, which his Sin entails upon himself. That evil, that degradation, cannot be removed without his own personal effort. Study, for example, the drunkard. You may, to some extent, remedy his external depredations, but you cannot morally mend *him* without his own active and strenuous co-operation. Every labourer in the cause of temperance knows this. Make ten thousand sacrifices for the drunkard and they are wholly useless unless you can induce him to co-operate strenuously in the work of Reform. What may be done for you as a free being, is of no importance as compared with what you may do for yourself. This is the necessary law of spiritual freedom. Or take a murderer. If A murders a man and B gets hanged for it, either voluntarily or involuntarily, A remains guilty of the murder. Nay, his crime is not merely not expiated, but rather hideously intensified by the fact that it has involved the death of innocent B. So with all

kinds of sinners. In no case can the reflex, *i.e.*, the spiritual or subjective consequences of sin, be transferred to another. Such a result is impossible and unthinkable. The leprosy of a body will not scale off but through an undergrowth of health in that very body; the leprosy of a soul cannot be consumed, but by the holy fire of virtue burning within that very soul. In a word, the scheme of vicarious substitution is positively immoral in practice and impossible in Ethical Law—which deals with a great province of Necessary Truth. Thus it is quite as impossible to accept the dogma of vicarious substitution as it would be to accept the proposition that $2 \times 2 =$ three thousand millions.

(B) In the second place, *the dogma cannot be made to harmonise with the facts of individual life.* It is universally acknowledged by all but the grossest materialists, that there are good men in the world as well as evil men. Now, the dogma of substitution necessarily and by its very nature is unable to take any notice of the character of the individual man, and is compelled to regard all men as equally reprobate; whereas the simple facts of the case are that the characters of individual men range from the saintly

down to the devilish. Some men are very bad farthings—very; others are jewels of infinite splendour. How are you going to make your dogma of substitution, or vicarious atonement square with these simple facts of the case? Obviously it cannot fit them. By the good man no substitute is required; whilst a substitute cannot possibly avail the evil man. If the evil man could be saved at will by a substitute, then indeed might the good man say—"Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocency."

Each patient *must* be contented to swallow his own physic, however nauseous it may be, nor expect to find any relief through getting it swallowed by some other person. If A is ill, of what advantage can it be to *him* to have a mustard-plaster stuck upon B! And yet, this is the orthodox theory of spiritual physic! This is what our poor orthodox friends require us to do in order that we may cure the maladies of our souls! O, Heaven and Earth, how shall we plumb the folly of man!

(C) In the third place, *the dogma puts a premium on spiritual pauperism, and is positively immoral in its application*,—inasmuch as it pro-

poses salvation for those only, however worthless intrinsically, who make their plea "the merits of Christ"; whilst it adjudges perdition to all those, however, worthy intrinsically, who do not or cannot make such a plea. Could such a dogma take effect, it would involve a complete subversion of justice. It would be a universe-wrecking impolicy to bestow boundless favours upon the intrinsically worthless (as the dogma requires), whilst it would be a (most heinous tyranny to reject intrinsic worth. "O ye sons of men, how long will ye turn my glory into shame? How long will you love vanity, and seek after leasing?"

(D) In the fourth place, *the dogma sets at naught the holiest requirements of Human Nature.* All the orthodox schools of theologians try to construct their schemes of salvation on a supposed ineradicable baseness of human nature. They ought, I submit, on the contrary, to construct their schemes of salvation on a recognisable and, probably, ineradicable element of good. In human nature, sin is no more "original" than virtue. Sacred science, at all events, must not forget to take cognisance of the heroes of humanity as well as of the

base persons; nor omit to construct a theory of salvation which will do ample justice to both parties. The omission to do this is a root-error of theologians. Let it be noted that to be happy in the moral or spiritual sense, you must be personally worthy of happiness. Put any good man in a high berth, or confer some honour upon him which he knows that he does not in the least deserve, and he will feel quite miserable over it; nay, if he be true to the core, he will scarcely accept what he has not earned. At all events he can never receive true honour from what he has not earned. High happiness or bliss is impossible, but on a basis of personal worth. There is no progress and no safety, but in a noble enthusiasm for personal virtue. How could any great soul grow enthusiastic in getting his account with God squared by any substitute however great! How can any brave man consent to transfer his woes and agonies to an innocent proxy! Hence the fatuity of any scheme of vicarial sacrifice. Let any good man consider it. Indeed none but the base could knowingly and complacently accept such a sacrifice. This brief consideration alone should overwhelm and bury the dogma out of sight.

Vicarious substitution is impossible in view of the sacred needs of human nature.

(E) In the fifth place, *the acceptance of the dogma of vicarious substitution does not, as it is said to do, relieve the known miseries of men.* I am forced to say this in spite of the voluminous ravings of the rapturous school of theologians. "Can'st thou forget that blessed hour," asks the late Mr. Spurgeon, "when Jesus met thee and said 'Come unto me?' Can'st thou not remember that rapturous moment when he snapped thy fetters, dashed thy chains to the earth and said 'I come to break thy bonds and set thee free?'" (*Daily Readings*, January 25.) Free from what? I wonder. Do such words arise out of felt, or out of factitious raptures? Can any living, sane soul seriously say that he remembers any such meeting,—any such incidents? Can any quite sane man with a business head on his shoulders, and sternly staring the facts of life in the face, actually say such things?

Or take the following glorification of spiritual pauperism. Hart, he says, "did not go beyond the truth when he said:—

'With my Saviour's garments on,
Holy as the holy one.'

"Then," he continues, "shall we know and taste and feel the happiness of this vast but short sentence, 'Complete in Christ.' Not till then shall we fully comprehend the heights and depths of the salvation of Jesus. Doth not thy heart leap for joy at the thought of it?" (The noble mind as we have seen, cannot possibly do such a thing—cannot possibly consent to transfer its woes to another.) "Black as thou art," he goes on, "thou shalt be white one day; filthy as thou art thou shalt be clean. O, it is a marvellous Salvation, this! Christ takes a worm and transforms it into an angel; Christ takes a black and deformed thing and makes it clean and matchless in His glory; peerless in His beauty, and fit to be the companion of Seraphs. O my soul, stand thou and admire this blessed truth of perfection of Christ." I can scarcely refrain from regarding these as bogus

1 January 28th. Or take the following:—"When the Lord first pardoned my sin, I was so joyous that I could scarce refrain from dancing. I thought on my road home from the house where I had been set at liberty, that I must tell the stones in the street the story of my deliverance. So full was my soul of joy that I wanted to tell every snowflake that was falling from Heaven, of the wondrous love of Jesus who had blotted out the sins of one of the chief of rebels."—*Daily Readings*, Feb. 1st.

raptures; and indeed I must confess that they are to me inexpressibly unmanly, not to say nauseous. They suggest to me the very intoxication of pietistical hallucination. It seems as if all the religionists had clothed themselves in a robe of rodomontade. We cannot render piety a better service than to make it ashamed of that garment. The Son of God was despised and rejected of men until his name carried with it the prestige of success. Once successful in attaining a sufficiency of applause, the common herd of men basely and nauseously grovel before him, and chant irrational pæans in his praise,—which is no honour to Christ. The later rabble are almost as irrational and sinful in their "worship" of Christ as the earlier rabble were in their condemnation. To this day the common Christian worship might be translated "Away with him!" for to this day, I believe, he has not been received by the Churches upon his proper and intrinsic merits. Study the foregoing Spurgeonian raptures. He actually seems to rejoice and calls upon others to rejoice in a hypothesised, but wholly undeserving rescue from utter ruin; in a dirt cheap attainment of celestial bliss. He elects self-defamation and

the defamation of the human race to the rank of a supreme saving virtue. He glories in his spiritual pauperism. He rejoices in that he is going to get rid of his blackness and filthiness at no personal cost whatever. He is ambitious, as it were, to be utterly worthless. Manly worship of Christ is degraded into a fatuous, raving adulation of that great Being. He professes that his heart "leaps for joy" at the thought of the salvation which has been gratuitously procured for such a worm as himself. He sings unprincipled hymns over his supposed triumph. It is almost impossible to conceive that anybody in his sober senses could give utterance to such language. If it were really true that a person possessed such convictions, life to him would become a mere whirl of unholy joy; sorrow and misery would cease; death itself would be welcome at any moment. But as a plain matter of fact (never forget the plain matters of fact), the persons who profess such raptures generally fear death and cling to life as eagerly as other people; as a plain matter of fact, they do not succeed in divesting themselves of their sorrows and miseries and handing them over to a substitute; as a burning matter of fact, the most

Godly men, even, have to continue to endure their sorrows and miseries as best they may. *This seems to be the scheme of Providence.* "Beloved," as Peter expressed it, "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you as though some strange thing happened to you. But rejoice *inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings*, that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." (I. Peter, 4, 12-13.) Thus, in Morals, each back must bear its own particular burden. The Apostle could not enter into Mr. Spurgeon's raptures over a supposed cheap salvation. He plainly tells us that we are to be "partakers" of Christ's sufferings before we can be sharers in his joys. This is rational and wise, and corresponds with the facts of the case; the dogma of substitution is irrational and unwise, and has no correspondence with the facts of the case.

In the name of God, let us abjure all pietism, which is wholly irrational, and let us cultivate piety, which is wholly rational and cannot put up with unreason.

(F) Sixthly, *the dogma is incompatible with the religious duty of personal effort.* You cannot teach the dogma of vicarious substitution

side by side with the duty of personal effort, personal virtue. The former paralyses the latter. Many a time, probably, you will find your parson on Sunday evening, stultifying all he has said on Sunday morning. If substitution be necessary, where does virtue come in? If virtue be necessary where does substitution come in? Thus even if you propose a double scheme of salvation, namely, works as well as substitution, you will find that whilst it is theoretically contradictory, it is, practically, unworkable. In all the walks of life, secular and sacred, the obvious scheme and requisition of Providence is that the individual shall do us much for himself as he possibly can.¹ This great truth being re-

¹ In the teeth of this fact we have our Spurgeons raving as follows:—"In no case, by no means, can sin be pardoned without atonement. It is clear that there can be no hope for me out of Christ; for there is no other blood-shedding which is worth a thought as an atonement for sin. Am I, then, believing in Him? Is the blood of His atonement truly applied to my soul? All men are on a level in their need of Him. If we be never so moral, generous, amiable or patriotic, the rule will not be altered to make an exception for us. Sin will yield to nothing less potent than the blood of Him whom God hath sent forth for a propitiation. What a blessing that there is one way of pardon! Why should we seek another?

"Persons of merely formal religion cannot understand how we can rejoice that all our sins are forgiven us.

cognised, there is no height of spiritual excellence and beauty to which the human race may not rise. To promote this ascent in himself and others, must be the highest work of a man ; to desire the accomplishment of it must be the most illustrious of all ambitions ; to accomplish it in any degree, the most glorious of all labours. Hence the measure of a man's salvation and greatness must lie not in escaping the punishments due to his sins, but in the extent to which he himself, according to his powers and opportunities, has attained to a status or habitude of

for Christ's sake. Their works and prayers and ceremonies" (consider the state of mind which mixes up ceremonies with works and prayers!) "give them very poor comfort ; and well may they be uneasy, for they are neglecting the one great Salvation, and endeavouring to get remission without blood. My soul, sit down and behold the justice of God as bound to punish sin ; see that punishment all executed upon thy Lord Jesus, and fall down in humble joy, and kiss the dear feet of Him, whose blood has made atonement for thee. It is in vain when conscience is aroused to fly to feelings and evidences for comfort : this is a habit which we learned in the Egypt of our legal bondage. The only restoration of a guilty conscience is a sight of Jesus' suffering on the cross."—*Daily Readings*, Feb. 2nd. It looks as if Mr. Spurgeon, if he had lived in ancient times, would have been a devotee of Moloch, or of Chemosh the abomination of the Ammonites. It must be a strangely perverted soul that derives satisfaction and contentment from witnessing tortures due to itself—if to any, inflicted upon an innocent substitute.

noble thinking and living. It seems to me that the pith of the Gospel is contained in such passages as *Matt.* 16, 24-27; 19, 17; 19, 27-29, and so forth; in none of which is any mention made of substitution; whilst all are bent on promoting health of soul, sanctity of character. Virtue is the one *vis medicatrix*—the only conceivable cure for moral evil.

In short, he only can be the man of true understanding who discerns the true end of life—namely, the ennobling of his character. He only can be the man of true wisdom who is faithfully seeking to attain this end. Is it not so? This world has no adequate meaning, but as a seed-ground for character. Mankind have more need of such truths than of railways and telegraph systems—if they only knew it.

It is comparatively easy to secure an epidemic of golf, or tall hats, or ceremonialism of any kind; but it is not easy to produce an epidemic of virtue! I am afraid that this happy epidemic will only be brought on, under God always, by the age-long labours and conflicts of sages and heroes. Tell us not of salvation by substitution. Remember that we have millions of conventionally "saved" persons—some of whom

would almost foam at the mouth over any proposed deviation from conventional orthodoxy, whilst all the time there exists the most terrible scarcity of simple, honest, determined men. There is no proposition whose truth is more manifest than this, namely, that Church orthodoxy is no warranty whatever for uprightness, nay, not even for decency of life. Orthodoxy, as a civilizing force, seems to be a great historic failure. Consider this grim and ungodly fact. Surely the chief aim should be to civilize and to make every man a civilizing agency.

For my part I don't believe in the Spurgeonian and orthodox theory that black creatures are instantly made white; that filthy ones are instantly made spotlessly clean; that worms are immediately transformed into seraphs. Generally speaking, it appears that great good, either for himself or others, can only be accomplished by the individual at great personal cost of some kind; and I don't think that there can be any short cut to Heaven, or indeed, any way at all, but that up the narrow, steep and rugged path of endeavour. In fact, let me remind all the orthodox that this was the doctrine of the Great

Master—"Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto Life." If the best temporal acquisitions are not to be obtained without stern labour, think you that the Eternal Glories are to be won without any labour at all!

Study the best secular methods of obtaining an object. An engineer, for example, requires long study and careful teaching in the principles and practice of his calling before he can become a good engineer: so a doctor, a lawyer, a carpenter, a smith or craftsman of any kind. Resolution, too, is required on the part of both pupil and instructor, to make the former well skilled in his craft. This is common knowledge. Are you fatuous enough, then, to suppose that you are going to make a good man of your hearer without intelligent teaching carefully directed to that great end, or without earnest study and devotion to his task, on the part of your hearer himself! If you wish to raise Christians—*i.e.*, in my rendering, heroes, it seems to me that you must continually be striving to inspire your hearers with heroical principles—daily engaged in teaching, reproof, exhorting, correcting and instructing them in righteousness. Your task actually should be to try to convert every-day

men and women into heroes and heroines, by the cogency of your reasoning and the fervour of your humanity. We are but dolts and dullards if we suppose that profane men are going to be turned into sacred men, selfish men into heroes, by dogmatical bug-a-boo, or by any kind of metaphorical washing or feasting or expiation. We are dolts and dullards if we suppose this, just as we should be dolts and dullards if we supposed that a man might be developed into a sound engineer through gesticulative effort, or by trying to indoctrinate him with fictitious engineering principles. This is indubitable. Enlightened doctrine on the part of the teacher and heroical effort on the part of the taught, are as necessary to produce a good man as are intelligent instruction and steady effort to make a good smith. It is only by realising that he has a high calling and by strenuous personal effort, that the individual can hope to lead a high life. The churches should be resounding with this clear and high strain every Sunday. The Gospel of brave endeavour must be established; the delusion of a cheap Salvation, utterly dispelled.

(G) Seventhly, *the dogma offers mankind no*

inducement to lead noble lives, whereas high inducements or motives are necessary to all noble action.—You can do nothing to uplift a man until you have awakened within him a sense of his possible dignity. To spur him on to noble action, you ought to cheer him with the thought of the greatness thereby attainable, and keep this possibility within his view. This must ever be the highest incentive and inspiration to noble life—the thought that by strenuous action you may not only do good to your fellow men but ennoble yourself. There is no proposition more certain than this; and yet in the very teeth of it, orthodoxy comes forward and insists that you shall regard everybody—the noble as well as the base, the hero as well as the sot, as “sold under sin,” “dead in trespasses and sins,” “possessed of no merit of his own” and so forth.

The Apostle Paul, unhappily, was a great offender in this way. He sometimes spoke as if that divine entity the human soul were no better than some old cracked water-pot, whereas it is *potentially* the noblest work of God that we are acquainted with. Nay, we are actually told that we are made in “the image of God.” I fervently wish that the great man—for great

he certainly was, had been inspired to adhere more steadily than he did to plain common sense, the most essential and divine, probably, of all brave faculties. His clay-pot theory has made terrible havoc amongst men's brains.

Just consider it. How are you going to inspire a man with those pietistic slanders! How are you going to uplift him if you try to assure him that he cannot possibly get possessed of any merits of his own; that he can do nothing for himself; that he has no more "say" in his destiny than a piece of clay; that there is no chance for him at all unless he can slink into Heaven on the merits of another! Surely such a dogma is rotten to the last fibre—rotten with all the rottenness of, trembling superstition and unworthy thoughts of the Majesty of God. Can we even conceive the possibility of a person consciously destitute of merit, being capable of bliss? I submit that the thought is involved in self contradiction. The bliss of such a person ought to consist of an eternal blush. No, rather show a man how strong he may be—always under God of course, how beautiful, how sublime: so may you inspire him to noblest endeavours and highest attainments.

It requires what I would call the operative doctrines to tap those sacred elements in our nature—to bring them out into full consciousness and free play. By means of the operative beliefs alone, can we hope for any kind of Reformation and Regeneration. Men, for example, are *convinced* that it is an honourable and noble thing to fight for their country; and as they are filled with this conviction, you find that when occasion requires, they shoulder their arms and go bravely forth to do it. So, likewise, if you want a man to be religious, you must endeavour to fill him with the *conviction* that religion is the noblest and most beautiful of all things; and if you do this, it is not improbable that he will try to be religious. At all events, you shall have furnished him with the loftiest motives for being religious. Beliefs can only be of high importance in so far as they afford a basis to, and inspire, noble action.¹

¹ A view of things which is rarely, if ever, set before us in the churches. The clergy are mainly spending their time in trying to inculcate beliefs—most of them irrational too, such as we are discussing; whereas they ought to be strenuously labouring every day to inculcate rational beliefs *which require and demand heroic action as their necessary complement and crown*. Those are necessarily the vital beliefs which spur us on to noble action; others are of no account.

This contention is fully sustained by the fact that there is an almost universal outcry against "Faith Healers" of the body. Such persons are properly looked on with so much hostility that when they try their faith-curing upon other bodies than their own they are rightly prosecuted and condemned as criminal fanatics; and this although they have a few words of scripture in their favour—"The prayer of faith shall save the sick," and other passages.

Now in all rational and philosophic and religious sobriety, the orthodox dogma of saving the soul by merely believing certain dogmas (which is erroneously termed "faith"), is no less extravagant and pernicious; the clamant facts of the case ever being that strenuous personal effort, if not more necessary, is at least as necessary to promote the health of the soul as that of the body. Due allowance being made for the temporary, adventitious and paltry triumphs of speciosity and the deceitful favours of what is called "Fortune," the Universal Law of Provi-

Thus millions of people seem to have no more heart-concern for sacred things than if they were millions of fleas hopping about; and this, I apprehend, because the sacred elements concealed in their spiritual constitution have not been tapped by vital and operative teaching.

dence seems to be that high attainment of any kind is the result of high personal endeavour, and that no attainment is the result of no endeavour. Nay, your very prayer becomes sin and condemnation, if not founded upon, and strenuously supported by, your own endeavours; whilst, on the other hand, you will probably grow disheartened and get defeated in your most strenuous endeavours unless you be strengthened and buoyed up by hope of Divine Aid.

Supposing that you are a godly man and that you are in danger of drowning, how do you propose to escape? Surely, in the first place, at all events, by strenuous, well-directed, personal efforts. It would mean not only drowning, probably, but impiety to handle the situation otherwise—to assume, for example, that God would save you without effort on your own part; or by assenting, say, to the dogma of the Trinity. So in all conceivable cases, faith in God, resignation to the Will of God, should at all times and in all militant circumstances, be supplementary merely to your own best efforts. Thus religious Faith is simply a hope and confidence—which may well be of mighty worth to us, that God will support and

give efficacy to our own best efforts in any field of action.¹ This, doubtlessly, was the theologic Faith of the man who said, "O, Lord of Hosts, blessed is the man who trusteth in thee."

In all good conscience we wish God to help us as much as, in His Divine Wisdom, He can; but at the same time, men should earnestly wish and earnestly strive to stand before Him not on the substituted merits of another, but, if possible, on clear merits of their own. And this, I think, must be a virtuous, a holy wish. For the very life of me I am unable to discern in it any suspicion of sinfulness.

The lesson of lessons, to be impressed on us is that sin necessarily implies the degradation, if not the misery, of the sinner, together with utter alienation from God; whilst virtue, on the other hand, necessarily implies the exaltation, if not the happiness, of the true man, together with Unity in the Supreme. Perhaps we can scarcely hope to be serenely wise in this world. It may well be that the highest thing we can do is to struggle to be wise; yet this personal striv-

¹ In other words, it might be regarded as personal effort, accompanied by absolute submission to, and complete confidence in, God.

ing after holiness is the only conceivable way of worshipping the Father "in Spirit and in truth"; and Christ is reported to have said that "The Father seeketh such to worship him."

Anything that has been added to this doctrine is, I fancy, little more than charlatanry or superstition. Molière said of the doctors of his day—"*tout leur art est pure grimace*." Anything in Religion beyond the worshipping of God in Spirit and in truth, may, I think, be safely taken as "pure grimace." It would be worth our while to try to inspire ourselves with the thought that every day we have work to do individually, which is worthy of the highest efforts of a King—namely, the purifying, strengthening and beautifying of our character. Indeed this is the most illustrious enterprise in which either King or peasant can engage.

The fact is, it appears, that Christ's Christianity has been buried by the orthodox under mountains of heathen rubbish. It is our most urgent duty to have it resurrected as soon as we possibly can. The possession of a pure religion is the first condition of human well-being.

(H) Finally, *the dogma of vicarious substitution is dishonouring to God and to Christ.*—And

whilst it is a clean subversion of human intelligence and a great dishonour to man to propose the repudiation of his moral responsibility and the transference of his sins to the head of another, it is a prodigious dishonour to God and to Christ to say that they have proposed your acceptance of a creed which, by its terms must degrade and dishonour you ; or that they require the subversion of your intelligence before they can render any service to you. I cannot find any clear passage—any passage unobscured by metaphor, in which Christ announced that it was his task to go to God to make propitiation or atonement for us with the Divine Majesty, or to offer himself as a substitute for us. There are a few strongly metaphorical passages attributed to him, which might admit of such a construction if, in the nature of things, such a construction were admissible ; but those few passages are utterly wiped out by the multitude of counsels and exhortations which he addresses to us as responsible beings who have to give account of our lives to God. Indeed we cannot admit the conceivability of a second person presenting himself, or being called in, to propitiate an all-perfect God in his attitude towards

man. Nay, I submit that it is a base and savage thought to hold regarding God,—a thought which is utterly irreligious and degrading to our conceptions of the Divine Majesty. If your son has offended you, but repented, what second person do you require to make propitiation and offer atonement for him! The suggestion were most grossly insulting even to a good earthly father. Revert again to the parable of the Prodigal Son, and realise the infamy of the substitutionary proposal. In short, there is not a rational word to say for it. The death of Christ is precious to us individually, in so far only as it may help us to reform ourselves individually. If, and when, by His sacred influence, Christ converts a dishonest man into an honest one; if, and when, by His sacred precept or example, he turns a weak man into a strong one, he is accomplishing the noblest kind of work, and establishing himself as the Saviour of that man in the highest sense conceivable. It is only thus, as far as we can make out, that any one can derive spiritual benefits from Christ. If being unreformed, you seek to claim privileges by the death of Christ, I take you to be a rogue, or an ignorant and profane person. You remain quite

barbarous all under the skin. It is only those who are working upon a basis of intelligent principles who can hope to do intelligent work. It is only those who are working upon a basis of noble principles who can hope to do noble work. It is only those who are working upon a basis of eternal principles who can hope to do eternal work.' True Revolutions and Reformations can only be accomplished by the forces of Intelligence and Morality.

CHAPTER. VI.

IRRATIONAL TEACHING THE CHIEF CAUSE OF THE FAILURE OF THE CHURCHES

IT is evident, then, that these three leading dogmas of all the orthodoxies—the dogma that the Scriptures are the Word of God, the dogma that God is Three Persons in One and One in Three, and the dogma that neither the Saint nor the Scoundrel is tolerable in the sight of God except through the vicarious and substitutionary suffering of Christ—are quite untenable. It is evident that these three leading dogmas are unsupported either by fact or principle, and that they are repugnant not only to sacred common sense but to the greater part of the Scriptures themselves: therefore, they are to be utterly rejected. The same sentence would have to be pronounced against most of the orthodox dogmas. Of the Thirty-nine Articles, for example, I think it may be safely taken that

about thirty of them are more or less controversial, while many of them are transparently false. In dwelling upon such matters it is not to be thought that rational conclusions can be, in any respect, inconsistent with duty to God; but rather that Religion itself, in demanding from us the honest use of our faculties, demands such conclusions. Mind is one. We do not possess a double set of faculties—this, theological; that, secular. It is, then, to be borne in mind that our dearly-hugged orthodoxies are not of God but of foolish men; that it is silly men and not Almighty God with whom we contend when we fight against our irrational Church dogmas.

Nor should we be greatly astonished at the worthlessness of these dogmas when we consider that they are births of the ages when "idiotcy was looked upon as a proof of God's favour, and epilepsy was considered the best medium of heavenly revelation." Consider the case of poor Elizabeth Barton so late as the time of Henry VIII. (*Pictorial History of England*, Vol. II, p. 384.) Most of the "science" of those days was as

barbarous as the theology; but the great reproach of our time is that while men of science have to a considerable extent seen their error, and are submitting more and more to the rule of reason—ever with the most excellent results, a very large number of the clergy are still offering the most stiff-necked opposition to the Authority of Reason. This, then, I suggest, is the chief cause of the Failure of the Churches. The clergy are working against reason. In theology only,—i.e., in sacred science, primæval and mediæval darkness still reign, although it may be that, in these Islands alone there are probably from forty to sixty thousand persons told off to study and teach that sacred science. That theological orthodoxy is a great failure is further seen very obtrusively in the great fact that whilst the conventionally orthodox may be numbered throughout the world by hundreds of millions, good men are scarcely to be found in simple dozens. Conventional orthodoxy, therefore, does not produce good men: that is to say, it does not produce the results which are required of it, and for which it exists so extensively and expen-

sively. Thus, Conventional orthodoxy is clearly a thing to be despised and, if possible, destroyed with all vigour and alacrity.

CHAPTER VII

RATIONAL REFORMATION IN THEOLOGY THE MOST HOPEFUL MEANS OF VITALISING THE CHURCHES

It appears, then, that we have probably found out one of the chief causes of the great Church-Failure in our midst, and of the dull moral stagnancy of the community. It is not lack of churches, clearly ; clearly, it is not lack of clergymen ; clearly, it is not lack of church-services, nor of Sunday-schools, nor of missionary enterprises, nor scarcity of Bibles, nor of Hymn-books ; nor lack of cash ; nor anything of that kind which is responsible for the dismal Failure ; but *barbaric falsehood in our Church Creeds with a corresponding misdirection in the ministrations of our clergy.*

An ignorant Architect working upon false principles and building upon rotten foundations cannot possibly provide us with a sound house.

We shall not think of giving a commission to build a steam-engine to a man wholly ignorant of mechanical engineering.

Who would propose, in these days, to conduct a hospital upon the basis of the medical dogmas of the Middle Ages! We are not going to be ruled by ancient opinion in any question of science or conduct.

Who could hope at this date to carry through a successful war against a terrestrial enemy, with an army led by officers imbued with obsolete military notions and wholly ignorant of modern armaments and modern military art!

Who can hope to wage war with the Devil successfully and advance the Kingdom of God upon a basis of falsehood and ignorance? None but ill-informed persons. Yet, this is precisely what the churches have been trying to do.

Nor can the cause of religion be advanced by hugging *uncertainties* in dogma or doctrine any more than by cherishing falsehood. Nay it is mere lying and not virtue at all, to profess certainty that any unproved doctrine or dogma is true. Common sense requires that every proposition which is either false or uncertain be discharged from the service of Godliness.

Notice that any enterprise whatever, can only be successful in so far as it observes and keeps itself in harmony with the laws of Nature. We must listen to no dogmas but to those of Nature and Intelligence. Engineering enterprise can only be successful in so far as it follows the laws of mechanical nature. Medical enterprise can only be successful in so far as it diagnoses the maladies and ministers to the natural wants of the human body. Church enterprise can only be successful in so far as it truly observes the facts and laws of our spiritual nature, and ministers to the sacred needs of the human soul. No good can be done against Nature.

The Church-people of all denominations should ponder upon the Divine significance of the fact that Nature is utterly heterodox,—utterly opposed to them, and proceed to tune their creeds into holy harmony with Nature. To be of any value, our creed must conform with Nature. Nature will never submit to conform to any creed. Indeed in the right sense of the word, there can be no heterodoxy but in opposition to Nature. If the churches could be induced to open their eyes to see the pure truth of this matter—if they could be induced to

attach themselves to truth as eagerly as they have in times past clung to falsehood, what a blessing it would be to the human race!

Science must prevail. Theology must be drastically reformed on purely scientific lines.

The theological and religious centre of gravity must be noted and accurately observed. Orthodoxy is foolishly trying to find, or rather, foolishly assuming that it has found, that centre of gravity in the Bible and in weak and conflicting traditions—all of which are more or less the work of sectaries and partisans. It is here proposed to find the required centre of gravity in the underlying and universal soul of man—which we all believe to be the authentic and first-hand work of God.

Until this be done and until Church enterprise be directed according to the sacred facts and imperative laws of our spiritual nature, it cannot nobly prosper nor reasonably hope to help the Nations forward in the higher civilization.

This grand work of Church Reformation urgently requires devoted labourers, both lay and clerical. It is a work which, if carried far enough, would automatically promote all kinds of Reforms. If Alexanders and Cæsars, am-

bitious of conferring benefits upon mankind were amongst us, they could not find any other enterprise so promising as this for the employment of their energies or the attainment of their desires; and all men who, according to their opportunities, engage in it with singleness of heart, are likely to find the highest satisfaction in their labours.